

**LANDSCAPE AS METAPHOR: THE INTERPRETATION OF SELECTED  
PAINTINGS BY (AMY) BERTHA EVERARD**

**VOLUME 1**

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a study of selected works of the South African landscape painter Amy Bertha Everard (1873-1965) with the emphasis on discovering relevant means of interpreting her use of landscape as metaphor.

In Chapter One Bertha's family history and background is traced. This includes developments in her work from the earliest known sketches and paintings, her travels, experiences and artistic training.

Chapter Two examines Bertha's relationships with family and friends, with a section at the end that discusses the candidate's interpretation of some of the letters that have been made available for this research by the Tatham Art Gallery. This is in order to establish some character traits that may be relevant to the subsequent interpretation of landscape as metaphor in the final chapter.

Chapter Three discusses selected paintings with reference to the analysis of their subject matter, composition and technique. Criticism of selected work is made with some reference to Frieda Harmsen's observations in The Women of Bonnefoi (1980), while some references are made to what appears to be previously undocumented works, discovered during this research. Exhibitions and reception of much of Bertha's work is also covered in this chapter. This is done in order to trace the development of her work within the context of her life experience with regard to her travels and relationships.

Chapter Four examines the influences of faith and religion on her life and possibly her art. As a self-appointed Anglican missionary and teacher to labourers on her farms, a great deal of time and energy was spent in this practice. Reference is made to some prevailing religious and social ideologies in southern Africa that may have influenced her activities or that may have been motivating factors in her desire to participate in this field.

Chapter Five discusses some of the possible discourses that may have affected Bertha's perception of art and her decision to pursue this as a career. In the absence

of much factual knowledge about the early period of her life in England, it is acknowledged that this interpretation is speculative. A survey of art practices and art institutions in Victorian England is made in an attempt to establish the prevailing conditions in the art world during her youth. Some reference is made to conditions in South Africa that may have influenced Bertha's perception of art and her decision to pursue this as a career.

Chapter Six discusses, in greater detail, aspects of the South African context in which Bertha Everard lived for the greater part of her adult life. A survey is made of the establishment and development of some early art institutions and the people who constituted the art world at that time in South Africa. This is in order to discover possible influences on her work and its reception as well as the socio-political and historical context that may have affected her life. As a counterpoint, the work of three of Bertha's contemporary female South African artists - Allerly Glossop, Maggie Laubser and Irma Stern - is discussed.

Chapter Seven discusses possible interpretations of landscape as metaphor related to specific paintings. In this chapter, nationalistic and imperialistic ideologies in South Africa are discussed, comparing Bertha's painting with that of J. H. Pierneef, and some possible interpretations of their use of landscape as metaphor.

Appendix 1 comprises two sections. The Summary of Letters is an overview of the letters that were studied for the purpose of this research. Their contents have been divided into sub-headings, related to areas of interest to this research, namely: Bertha's relationship with Edith, Charles, her children and motherhood, relationships (in general) and issues of gender, politics and racism, mission work and faith, landscape and weather, illness, exhibitions and criticism, work and painting. The Everard Letters gives selected quotations from the letters researched, under the same sub-headings.

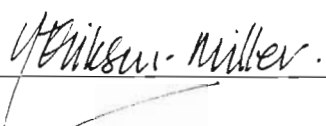
Appendix 2 records an interview with Leonora Everard Haden, by the candidate, in which Everard Haden's written responses are recorded.

Volume 2 contains illustrations of most of Bertha's work that are referred to in the dissertation.



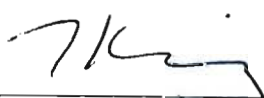
## DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation, unless indicated to the contrary in the text, is my own work. This thesis is being submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of Masters in Fine Arts in the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university.

Signed: 

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As the candidate's supervisor, I have approved this dissertation for submission.

Signed:   
Date: 17/7/02

## ABBREVIATIONS

These abbreviations are primarily found in Volume 2.

? = possible

aka = also known as

A Leigh = Alana Leigh

B Haden, G's Bay = Bryan Haden, Gordon's Bay

BE = Bertha Everard

BK = Bertha King

Bloem = Bloemfontein

Bury = Catherine Bury

c. = circa

cm = centimetre

CT = Cape Town

DAG = Durban Art Gallery

Fam.coll = family collection

JHB = Johannesburg

LEH = Leonora Everard Haden

N Leigh = Nichola Leigh

nd = not dated

pers com LEH 2001 = interview with LEH

PMB = Pietermaritzburg

Private coll = private collection

R = Ruth Everard

SA House = South Africa House, London

SANG = South African National Gallery, Cape Town

SKE Plett = Sebastian K Everard, Plettenberg Bay

Std Bank Corp = Standard Bank Corporation

TAG = Tatham Art Gallery, Pietermaritzburg

Univ of Pretoria = University of Pretoria

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## **NOTES ON THE TEXT**

- 1) Text enclosed in square brackets is my own interpretation of data
- 2) All measurements are in metric form
- 3) The titles are usually treated as grammatical sentences, using capitals only for the first word unless necessitated by nouns, unless quoted from a source where capitals are used throughout.
- 4) The plates are illustrated in a separate volume and are in chronological order where possible, where no dates are given.

## INTRODUCTION

This dissertation on a selection of Bertha Everard's paintings seeks to discover more about what constitutes the subject of this research and what it was about landscape painting that so inspired her. What was intriguing was the sense of space and underlying melancholy that appears to pervade her work. An extraordinary variety of techniques were employed to create some such remarkably modern looking paintings during a time when Victorian narrative and academic approaches to landscape were pervasive. Although, in general, a clear progression or development in style in an artist's work might be expected, Bertha's work does not appear to comply with such notions.

During the course of this research it became clear that Bertha's work had been subject to various powerful discourses that were not always conducive to the continued pursuit of painting. Despite the political nature of the art world as it was then, the obstacles placed in her path by what may be considered to be gendered discrimination as well as the sometimes tragic events of her life, Bertha managed to create some remarkable and expressive works.

Historians have attributed Bertha's increasingly expressive style to her influence by the French avant-garde artists with whom she came in contact during her stay in Paris in 1925 (Harmsen 1980, 104-106). This research argues that while she seemed to have gained greater confidence in self-expression during this time, significant departures from her earlier academic style may be seen some time before her sojourn there. It is suggested that Bertha's work relied far more heavily on her own sense of self-worth and state of mind than to exotic influences. However, it is acknowledged that this penchant for attributing foreign styles to local artists does at first glance seem to be borne out, but as Bell (1988, 2) points out, the argument may be inadequate and overly simplistic. Bertha's isolation and remoteness from the art society, self-imposed or otherwise, excludes her from the more obvious influences of local South African artists. Such influences were sought by this research but few were found.

It may be speculated that Bertha's strongest influence was from her sister Edith (a poet, water-colourist, teacher and committed Christian) and from the art books and journals that

she may have read. Roger Fry's innovative and controversial articles on art may well have appealed to Bertha's preference for adventure and non-conformist attitude to the insular world that she had chosen to inhabit. Regrettably, this research was not able to ascertain which, if any, examples of his work she may have read, so it is acknowledged that this perception may be more aligned to this researcher's own preconceptions and desire to fit Bertha into a "tidy box". Bertha's life and work has resisted this pigeon holing in previous attempts by, for example, Harmsen (1980) to find abstract leanings in her work. Bertha was an individualist. While acknowledging that many of the discourses prevalent in her times may have been conditional to her existence, she appears to have maintained a stubborn resistance to some of their influences, especially in her criticism of current gender issues.

It is acknowledged that some of Bertha's work suffered from periods of indecision and that there are some poorly executed images but this should not preclude one from accrediting her best work. Whatever viewpoint is taken about her position in the history of South African art, it must be recognised that her presence there is difficult to dispute. In a more egalitarian Postmodern climate, this research hopes to review and perhaps help to re-establish what may be considered one of South Africa's less acknowledged artists. In this dissertation, some possible reasons for her absence from the art world during her life are discussed. What becomes increasingly clear is that the patriarchal nature of the discourses of her times bears a measure of responsibility in this instance. This includes, by implication, the regrettable lack of public support for women artists during that time. This appears to be especially noticeable in terms of patronage and acknowledgement of women's professional status, unless the artist was able to engage actively in self-promotion.

Although little wholly new information was discovered during this research, and certain of its deductions remain speculative, it has perhaps revealed a more personal interpretation of the life and work of this largely under-rated artist. An important aspect of this research may be found in Appendix 1 that contains extracts from Bertha's letters that are housed in the Tatham Art Gallery in Pietermaritzburg. Many more letters are in the possession of her granddaughter, Leonora Everard Haden.



## **CHAPTER 1: Amy Bertha Everard: her life and work**

A brief survey of the circumstances of Bertha Everard's life \* is pertinent to this research. Many of the details pertaining to Bertha's early history are available in the unpublished document by J.I. Sturt in the Tatham Art Gallery archives and factual information pertaining to her later life are available in Harmsen's The Women of Bonnefoi (1980). It may be useful to outline some of the events here for the purposes of clarity and to facilitate further analysis.

The details of Bertha's parentage and early childhood are gleaned from an account written in 1993 by Sturt, a member of the family, who is possibly the grandson of Henry Sturt, Bertha's half-brother. This document does not profess to be entirely factual and the details, while based on fact, may to some extent be speculative. In the absence of more factual evidence, this chapter attempts to fill in vague areas in the account of Bertha's parentage and childhood.

Amy Bertha Everard was born in Durban, South Africa, in 1873. According to Sturt, she was the younger daughter of English parents, the gentle and refined Mary and the rambunctious Captain William Valentine King, whose violent temper and irrational rages surfaced only after their marriage. They had immigrated to South Africa in 1869 from Dieppe in France where they had met and married after a brief courtship (Sturt 1993, TAG).

Her parents' marriage was an unhappy one and the recorded details of their life together suggest emotional if not physical abuse by King. He was irrationally jealous of Mary, of whose virtue he was doubtful, as she had had a child, Henry, out of wedlock before her marriage to him. Often out of work and a drunkard, King did not provide a stable home for the family. Fearing for her life and the safety of her children, and living in what appears to have been extreme poverty and loneliness, in 1874 Mary secretly planned to leave her husband and return by ship to England with her three children - Henry, Edith and Bertha, as she was known. This journey was made possible by a small allowance from Henry's father

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\* As matriarch of the Everard Group which constitutes six female descendants of the Everard family, it is necessary to refer to the subject of this research by her name Bertha as she was known, rather than Amy or simply Everard, both of which could be confusing.

that she had secretly saved and from the sale of a few personal possessions that she had not told her husband about.

Fearful of King's jealous rages, Mary and her children left their home one day while King was away, and travelled some distance by carriage to the dock at Port Elizabeth. Mary learned that King was in pursuit and despite her precautions King found the children in Port Elizabeth and abducted Edith while Mary was securing tickets for their passage back to England. Their distraught mother found Edith and King the next day. King had been jailed overnight for his drunken behaviour. Presumably in the absence of any more suitable accommodation, the young Edith was also incarcerated overnight. Edith was released to the mother on the morning of their departure and they left for England (Sturt 1993, TAG).

On arrival in England, Mary left the two girls in foster care and Henry at a school at St. Bees, in Cumberland, England, and went into service as a governess in Ireland. However, despite Mary's concern, King did not pursue the family. In anger, he disowned and disinherited them and they never saw him again. Unbeknown to them, King's body was later discovered in a disused well in South Africa in about 1880, apparently murdered in revenge by his mistreated black servants (Sturt 1993, TAG).

Edith and Bertha were taken in by a strict but sympathetic couple who cared for them with the help of money that Mary sent from Ireland for their keep. The girls received their early education at home, as was common at the time, but were later sent to a high school in Brighton (Harmsen 1980,19) at the suggestion of Henry Sturt, their considerably older half-brother. Both girls were considered to be remarkably intelligent. According to sources (Harmsen 1980 and Sturt 1993) their further education was facilitated by either an undisclosed member of the King family, or an affluent friend of the King family, who, on learning of the girls' financial predicament, and perhaps in acknowledgement of their father's neglect, donated funds towards the girls' further education (Harmsen 1980, 8 and Sturt 1993, TAG).

During these formative years, Edith and Bertha grew inextricably close. Edith, the elder, was

always the stronger, more stable of the two and provided a sound base for her more emotionally labile sister. Although very different in character, they both developed an interest in art, showing some talent at an early age. Restricted by the opportunities for work available to them in late Victorian England, the girls elected to study art. Edith studied Modern Languages (French and German), Botany and later Art at various institutions in England between 1891 and 1894, (Harmsen 1980, 8) following her chosen path towards a teaching career with a single-minded dedication that remained characteristic of her in later life.

Bertha's school education and later artistic training is discussed in Harmsen (1980), but it appears that she went to Vienna in 1891-1893 to study as a concert pianist. It may have been considered unusual at the time for a young woman to study or travel abroad, but was not unheard of (Campbell Orr 1995, 16, 17). Details of this period are not clear but she appears to have stayed with family friends. Despite her enthusiasm and lengthy period of study, she found the required amount of dedication and many hours of practice too rigorous. Esme Berman (1970, 107) suggests that she first started painting seriously during this period, but this has not been confirmed elsewhere. In 1893 Bertha returned to England and enrolled at the Slade School of Art. Bertha was unhappy there, finding the Slade teaching methods restricting and dull, later describing their teachers as "hidebound" (Harmsen 1980, 9). This irascibility with regard to what she perceived as stuffiness, was to resurface later when her daughter Ruth attended the same school.

In 1894 she attended the Herkomer School in Bushey. This institution was considered by Hesketh Hubbard to be "the most important of the private schools" (Harmsen 1980, 9). The Bavarian Hubert Herkomer (1849-1914) founded this school in 1883. His conservative, academic work was much admired in Victorian circles and was, predictably, highly criticised by Clive Bell and the "moderns" (Harmsen 1980, 45, 46). Hubbard (1951, 122, 123) describes Herkomer as being a competent water-colourist, and group portrait painter. It was during these formative years that Bertha experienced *plein air* painting, something that she continued to do so long as her health allowed (Harmsen 1980, 9).

Harmsen (1980, 12) suggests that in 1896 Bertha probably studied at the Westminster School

of Art under W.Mouat-Loudon (1860-?) but from 1897-1899 she attended the St. Ives School of Landscape Painting in Cornwall, under Julius Olsson (1864-1942) where her abilities were thought to have been considerable enough to stand her in good stead as a teacher.

On the 17<sup>th</sup> October, 1900, Bertha was awarded the Ablett Teacher's Certificate from the Royal Drawing Society of Great Britain and Ireland (as was her sister Edith in 1905) and she went on to teach at Walthamstow Hall, Seven Oaks, in Kent. The curriculum of this progressive girls' school explains the advanced pedagogical ideas held by Bertha and Edith when they came to a very conventional South African educational system at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Bertha had also baulked at some of the appallingly unimaginative systems of art teaching in the schools in Britain. On leaving Walthamstow, Bertha was accredited in a glowing testimonial for her outstanding teaching and artistic abilities (Harmsen 1980, 18 19).

During Bertha's early life in England, her work tended to be typical of the Victorian taste for picturesque landscapes, which were meticulously rendered in either paint or ink. Bertha's paintings of cottages in Cornwall and fishing boats at St Ives (Figs. 5, 6) painted between 1897 and 1899 were amateurish attempts to emulate landscape painting at that time that depicted tumble-down dwellings and nostalgic vistas, where the rawness of the increasingly industrialised landscape was ignored in favour of "untouched" nature. This romantic attitude to agrarian landscapes is also perceptible in much of Bertha's later work. Harmsen refers to Kentish poppyfield (nd) (Fig. 11) as having "Ruskinian gloom and Impressionist subject and technique" (Harmsen 1980, 15). It is possible that the conflicting motivations, subject matter and technique inherent in Romanticism and Impressionism may have been responsible for the hesitant approach and style in Bertha's early work. The divergence of these two styles concerning subjective or objective approaches to subject matter may be understood as the searching for a suitable *métier* in a young painter. Bertha was painting at a time when the more objective Impressionist style and the more emotive and expressionist style of Romanticism seemed to be at odds with the more classically oriented academic styles. Unsure which manner suited her best, Bertha appears to have tried to evolve an approach to her painting that could incorporate aspects of these divergent styles.



During her life, Bertha appears to have infrequently painted portraits of women and children. Those that are recorded reveal a predilection for sweetness and sentimentality rather than a desire to explore either technique or the character of the sitter. For example, her unfinished sketch of her sister Edith King Portrait of a Lady (c.1895) (Fig. 4) and Cornish Girl (c.1895) (Fig. 7), exhibit a certain naivety in composition and subject. Harmsen (1980, 12, 13) suggests that Bertha appeared to be striving for a somewhat romanticised “likeness” of the sitter with emphasis on a superficially dextrous virtuosity, perhaps typical of the attempts of a student whose drawing talent supersedes that of any acquired painterly ability. However, these incomplete sketches have a lightness in handling and freshness of colour that is absent in some of her large and more ponderous works.

Prior to her move to South Africa in 1902, Bertha’s response to the influence of Impressionism (albeit in a somewhat romantic and sentimental Anglicised form) can be seen in sketches of farmyard scenes, for example Dune landscape (nd) (Fig. 14), Farmyard (nd) (Fig.13) and Study of ducks (c. 1901) (Fig.15), where her interest in the subject was secondary to experiment with a looser handling of paint and colour values. These works are small in scale and do not attempt to create a “finished” look. Bertha did not always sustain this attribute of freshness, lightness and sensitivity of touch as seen in the smaller works. Many larger works appear to be attempts to create a more finished surface.

In 1901 at the age of twenty-eight, the ever restless Bertha applied successfully for a teaching post in South Africa and joined the staff as art mistress at Pretoria Girls’ High on the 26<sup>th</sup> September 1902 (Harmsen 1980, 19). The school arranged for a holiday for some of the staff during Christmas in 1902 at Bonnefoi, an attractively situated trading post on the Eastern Transvaal escarpment, near the town of Carolina (see Fig.132 for map) (Harmsen 1980, 20). It was here that Bertha’s teaching career was interrupted by the chance meeting of Charles Joseph Everard (1853-1946). He was the owner and manager of the prosperous trading store named Bonnefoi, a meeting place on the farm Mislukt.

Bertha and a friend had declined the invitation for the holiday, as Bertha, “quick tempered and opinionated”, had quarrelled with one of her colleagues (Harmsen 1980, 2). Instead Bertha

and her friend went to Belfast some 40 kilometres away. However, Bertha, keen to receive her long-awaited post from England, decided to borrow a horse (she had apparently never ridden before) to ride to Bonnefoi to fetch it. She did not reach her destination that night but slept over at a farmhouse, and continued on her way the next morning (Harmsen 1980, 2). There she first met Charles, a man some twenty years her senior (Bertha was twenty-nine at the time). Charles and two of his brothers, Horace and Thomas, had come to South Africa from England as colonists. Another brother remained in England to manage the family-owned brewery.

Charles persuaded Bertha to stay with her teaching colleagues at Bonnefoi, and a romantic liaison began. Bertha painted her first picture of the trading store, Bonnefoi Store, Christmas (1902) (Fig.32), and gave it to Charles as a gift. They were married on the 27<sup>th</sup> of June, 1903, in Pretoria. She left Pretoria Girls' High School on the 30<sup>th</sup> June to live at Bonnefoi. Bertha set about designing and overseeing the building of the homestead which was later also known as Bonnefoi.

Bertha's marriage to Charles, as Arnold suggests, was probably "less to do with love than with biology and convention" (Arnold 2000, 58). Bertha, unmarried at twenty-nine, may have been considered a spinster by Victorian standards. Coupled with what may have been a desire to have children and establish her own family, Charles as an available, mature and personable man, must have seemed a suitable candidate for marriage.

In 1904 Edith came to South Africa to be with Bertha for the birth of Ruth at Nottingham Road, Natal. Ruth was born on the 19<sup>th</sup> of June. Bertha was determined to have a woman doctor and so had travelled the considerable distance from Bonnefoi for that purpose. As luck would have it, her doctor was also pregnant and nearing her confinement, so could not do the delivery, at which point the doctor's husband assisted Bertha. Mary, Bertha and Edith's mother, was apparently also there to witness the event, but little more has since been established about her and, to date, no record of her whereabouts have been found (Harmsen

1980, 23). (Everard Haden suggests that Mary stayed on in South Africa, but died after complications following the removal of a goitre, but this has not been confirmed).

Edith stayed at Bonnefoi for about a year, then returned to England for six months to settle her affairs, received the Ablett Teachers' Certificate and returned to South Africa to teach temporarily at Eunice School, Bloemfontein, in the Orange Free State, from about mid-1905 to mid-1907 (Harmsen 1980, 60). After two years she resigned from the school to assist Bertha on the farm at Bonnefoi, as Bertha's health remained indifferent after Ruth's birth.

Both women were perceived as having strong, sometimes opposing views on various matters, and were not afraid of expressing them. They would often engage in argument, to the amusement of their male acquaintances (Harmsen 1980, 4). Bertha is described at different times by Harmsen (1980) as being: forceful, domineering, tiny, vital, dynamic, impetuous, emotional, verbal, argumentative, opinionated and restless, whereas Edith was thought of as introspective, disciplined, un-temperamental, steady and spiritual. Furthermore Harmsen suggests that Bertha's manner leant to a more spectacular, distinctive style, with large canvases, whereas Edith's were smaller, less flamboyant and had greater depth.

This research suggests that Bertha's work reveals the artist to be far less assertive and confident than was presumed. Her most successful work was not that which was presented as major finished works. In her smaller, less self-conscious paintings she revealed personal insecurities and a less dogmatic approach that, it may be asserted, were far more appropriate reflections of the private persona which she struggled to preserve and conceal.

It should be remembered also that Edith largely painted in watercolours, for her own enjoyment, as a spiritual or emotional expression of herself. Although her work was exhibited, this was not a primary motivation. Bertha, on the other hand, was determined to carve a niche for herself as a professional artist (Harmsen 1980).

During this time at Bonnefoi, Edith revised poems for children that she had written while still in England, with illustrations for twenty of them, mostly of flowers and insects. (These were

never published but are housed at the Pretoria Art Museum). Bertha assisted her with the drawings of children as Edith was: “quite incapable of drawing people and animals” (Harmsen 1980, 26). Bertha gave birth to Rosamund on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of July, 1907, and Sebastian on the 30<sup>th</sup> of May, 1909, both in Carolina (Harmsen 1980, 24, 28). In 1912, Edith reapplied to Eunice for the position of headmistress, was accepted and returned to the school on the 13<sup>th</sup> of January 1913 (Harmsen 1980, 62).

By 1908, Bertha had begun mission-work at Bonnefoi among the farm labourers (Addleson, 2000, 17). Both Bertha and Edith involved themselves with this project. Both learned to speak the indigenous language sufficiently well to express themselves in sermons on the farms, although Everard Haden suggests that she used an interpreter. In a letter to Edith, Bertha complained of the difficulty she experienced trying to communicate in a foreign language. She wrote: “Oh I wish I could speak to them in my own language. I wish I could get a little more help. I do feel such a stupid old thing.” (TAG undated letter no 113). Bertha often sought Edith’s advice on these and other spiritual matters.

Bertha had to come to terms not only with her new position as married woman, but with the local Afrikaans farming community, who had until recently been the enemy in the South African War (1899-1902), and with the indigenous black people. Charles managed the store, a businessman rather than a farmer, so Bertha oversaw the building of the many homesteads and the day-to-day running of the farms.

She was determined to educate her children at home as she was critical of most public educational institutions (Harmsen 1980). It may be speculated that her desire to keep her children at home, at least initially, was an indication of her sense of rejection by her mother at an early age. However, it was common practice in late Victorian England for younger children to be educated at home, with the assistance of a governess. Bertha did employ such women, but as Harmsen indicates, these periods were brief and usually ended acrimoniously due to Bertha’s advanced pedagogical ideas and her irritability with what she perceived as their laxness or incompetence (Harmsen 1980).



Without any training in agriculture, initially unable to speak the native languages, and despite periods of great tribulation, she successfully farmed large tracts of land and established a relatively successful (albeit short-lived) school and Christian mission. Bertha acknowledged the difficulty of managing a black labour force in a letter to Edith dated the 25<sup>th</sup> of March, 1927: “My greatest difficulty is my sex. Even after all these years it is hard to manage a native if you are male but for the female it is almost impossible but I get things done nevertheless.” (Arnold 2000, 56).

Bertha was always at the forefront of any activities on the farm, undertaking physically onerous tasks. While supervising the building of a dam on a new farm, she commented in a letter dated the 25<sup>th</sup> of March, 1927:

I am also directing ploughing, sowing and fencing and a little road making. It does keep me moving about. These last few days I have begun long before breakfast and gone on till dark. I shall not always be so strenuous but if I am to make the farms pay, no time is to be lost. Painting is very far off. Yet sometimes I look about with a painter's eye. Some of the pictures I see are tenderly beautiful (Arnold 2000,57).

In an attempt to educate the black labourers and their children, Bertha enthusiastically began a farm school for this purpose. A schoolhouse was later built. Under Edith's influence, Bertha began work as an Anglican missionary among the labourers (Harmsen 1980, 32), and learned to converse in the native languages (not fluently, according to Everard Haden), and she and Edith preached the Christian message with the help of an interpreter (pers com LEH 2001). Bertha's attempts at education and missionary-work were to become a source of great distress to her. She found the labourers to be recalcitrant, especially as far as her well-intentioned but apparently misdirected services went.

Bertha had been painting intermittently, depending on her health, family commitments, missionary-work, and farming and domestic schedule. In 1910 her major work, Mid-Winter on the Komati (c1910) (Fig. 39), was awarded a gold medal for landscape painting at the Arts and Crafts exhibition in Johannesburg. This work was previously believed to be Peace of

Winter (1909)\* (Fig. 37).

In 1913, Catherine Bury arrived at Bonnefoi as an assistant and companion to Bertha, who had become incapacitated with blood poisoning, contracted after an accident while working on the farm. Bertha's active participation on the farm was one of the many reasons why her artistic production was often severely curtailed. Bury was Bertha's tireless assistant, doing menial domestic chores as well as helping with mission work and acting as secretary. It is said that she did none of these things particularly well, and was initially regarded by the children as an intruder, and mercilessly teased and criticised. She always meant well and, in time, the family developed a tolerant affection for her. She became inseparable from Bertha, nursing her as an invalid before her death in 1965 (TAG undated letter no139). Bury remained with the family until she died, six years after Bertha, in 1971 (Harmsen 1980, 39).

Despite the many and frequent interruptions to her artistic output, Bertha defined herself as an artist. Arnold says: "... painting was the core of her private identity; this was her means of expression, her way of communicating responses to the world." (Arnold 2000, 57). Arnold suggests that Bertha burdened herself with so many duties and activities because of convention and a strong desire to have children. That Bertha orchestrated the events of her life soon becomes evident. She undoubtedly dominated decision-making about child-rearing, farm management and the movements of her family and children. Her unstinting devotion to these issues is evident. Her complete immersion in the act of painting is evidenced by her physical and emotional decline after each major work. The ill health that dogged her after the birth of her children (she was diabetic and suffered from debilitating gastric and neurological complaints) may have been related to the severe depressions she experienced (TAG letters).

Bertha developed the riverside farm Lekkerdraai in about 1910 or 1911, about sixty kilometres from Bonnefoi. It soon became Bertha's preferred home and, as an isolated escape from the bustling Bonnefoi homestead, was a favoured place to paint. According to Harmsen (1980, 38) it inspired some of Bertha's most energetic work. This research suggests that this was to some extent true with reference to sheer scale, but some of her most poignant work

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\* Harmsen (1980) and Addleson (2000) propose different dates, 1910 and 1909 respectively.

was certainly inspired by European landscapes. The Delville Wood series (1926) (Figs. 103-110) and the Bruneval series (1925) (Figs. 85-90) are examples of great energy although smaller in scale than some of the Lekkerdraai paintings. Charles, Bertha's husband, usually stayed at Bonnefoi, but would occasionally venture out to visit the family there for a short while, or send more supplies by ox wagon.

Skurweberg (now a farm) is about halfway between Bonnefoi and Lekkerdraai at the head of a precipitous pass leading down to the Komati valley. Besides using this as a sheltered overnight stop *en route* to their annual excursion to Lekkerdraai, the family often camped here when they wanted a short holiday away from the farm. Bertha did a great deal of painting here with subjects varying from close-up rocks and trees, to wide vistas towards Swaziland (Harmsen 1980, 50).

In 1915 Edith asked for Bertha's assistance in the making of the Eunice Banner (Harmsen 1980, 64) (Fig. 48). Pencil sketches of Bertha's preparatory drawings in Everard Haden's collection reveal her aptitude at capturing the charming nature of children at play (Figs. 128-130). The banner is in similar vein to those often produced in Victorian England where the preference for moralising through the craft of embroidery was used to good effect. It depicts the centralised figure of a standing woman, her left arm raised in an attitude similar to depictions of the Christ figure in paintings since before the Renaissance, her other holding a book, while two young girls in the school uniform of the time are enraptured by their teacher. In the background, there is a symbol of the rising sun. Light appears to have been a source of religious inspiration for Bertha. In a letter to Edith she wrote: "... full of the gloom of unlighted darkness. How dark 415 BC must have been. The amazing thing is that in spite of the darkness they could still see. Even with our Great Light, one is so blind." (TAG undated letter no 64). The name of the school and the dictum *Vincit qui se Vincit* is embroidered. The borders of this pentagonal banner are decorated with the ubiquitous yellow mimosa flowers and thorns, reminiscent of the almost impenetrable hedge suggested in various texts and illustrations about Sleeping Beauty. This separation from the world by a thorny barrier may suggest Bertha's appropriation of the confining Victorian ideal of separate spheres for women and men, and conforms to the then contemporary ideal of separate sex schooling.

Bertha frequently took ill after strenuous painting excursions, for example, once after camping out in the somewhat spartan surrounds at Skurweberg. She would spend long periods of time exposed to the elements, until she felt the work was complete. Often after such episodes, she experienced periods of illness, fatigue, depression and self-doubt. She was advised by her doctor to go to the coast in 1917 in order for her chest complaint to heal and to assist with the depression that seized her after arduous painting sessions. Recuperating from one such episode at Isipingo on the Natal coast, south of Durban, Bertha remarked that she could not find the energy for, nor had the inclination to paint (TAG undated letter no 30 from Isipingo).

It was during a holiday in Isipingo in 1917 that Henry Sturt, Bertha's half-brother, implored her to send her children to a public school rather than educate them at home herself. She was annoyed and wrote to Edith for advice. Much to Bertha's confusion and dismay, Edith supported her brother. Eventually, and very reluctantly according to Harmsen (1980, 70), Bertha agreed to send the girls to Eunice High School in Bloemfontein and they were enrolled after Easter in 1919. Bertha, Bury, Ruth, Rosamund and Sebastian lived in a rented furnished house in Monument Road in Bloemfontein for about a year. The girls stayed on at the boarding school under Edith's watchful eye and the others returned to Bonnefoi. Despite her initial reluctance, Bertha subsequently declared that unless she had sent them to school they would grow up "selfishly and never recognise their obligations to their fellow-men, and after all the latter is *the* reason for living." (Harmsen 1980, 70).

In about August, 1921, Bertha decided to move to Cape Town for a while as there had been some concern about Ruth's heart and she was advised by a doctor to go to the coast. Bury and the children lived at 33 Alexandra Avenue, Oranjezicht, and then in March 1922 they moved to 23 Beach Road, Mouille Point, Three Anchor Bay (Harmsen 1980). Ruth was seventeen years old by then. She attended various courses part-time and enrolled as an occasional student at the Cape Town School of Art under George Crosland Robinson. Neither Bertha nor Ruth admired Crosland Robinson's work, and it seems that neither did he admire theirs. However, Ruth attended life classes there as well as violin lessons at the College of Music. Fourteen-year-old Rosamund returned to Eunice in 1922, and Sebastian was sent to school in



Cape Town. It was at this point that the two young Swazi boys, Joseph and John Mkhabela, whom Bertha had virtually adopted, made their appearance. They were adopted in order that they might be educated and afterwards do mission work at the Everard farms. To “earn their keep”, they did house and garden work for the family (Harmsen 1980, 74).

During this time in Cape Town, Bertha did no painting as Harmsen (1980, 74) suggests she suffered from “gastric afflictions”. Bertha did try to organise the establishment of an art school under her direction on a hunting lodge near Camps Bay much in the line of the Herkomer School that she had attended as a student. It came to nothing.

Moses Kottler made a plaster model of Ruth during this period, and after an abortive attempt, Bertha received a second model that is still owned by the family although it is now in a rather deteriorated state. Everard Haden suggests that Kottler was an acquaintance of the family and had visited Bonnefoi on previous occasions (pers com LEH 2001).

Despite the fact that the younger children seemed happy with their current schooling arrangements, Bertha once more felt the need to move on, allegedly for the children’s benefit. It is possible that Bertha’s apparent restlessness could also have been attributed to the poor reception of her work and the failure of her plans to open an art school in Cape Town. Bertha made arrangements for schooling for both her children and the two Swazi boys who were to accompany them. These arrangements appear to have met Charles’ grudging approval. After a somewhat unusual and tense visit by Charles to Cape Town to discuss these matters, they set sail for England in August or September 1922, and Charles returned to Bonnefoi. Bertha, Bury and the children were settled in London in September of that year (Harmsen 1980, 80).

Initially they stayed in rented accommodation, in order to secure Ruth’s admission to the Slade School of Art, and to visit the museums and galleries. Once this was done they moved to Harpenden, Hertfordshire, where they finally settled in at Leyton House.

In the spring of 1923, Edith joined their group during her sabbatical. They all went to Italy where they enjoyed an eventful and what must have been an educational and inspiring visit.

Bertha wrote a detailed description of their journey to Charles (Harmsen 1980, 83). On her return to South Africa, Edith resigned her post at Eunice School, so that she could join Bertha and the family in England (Harmsen 1980, 90). It is apparent from her letters that Bertha continually longed for the comfort of her sister's greater organisational skills, as well as her company and advice on all matters pertaining to the running of the household, the education of the children and her own painting and so was happy that Edith had resigned and was able to join them.

During 1923, Ruth and a group of friends went to France on a sketching course with a teacher. Dissatisfied with the Slade (as her mother had been), it was decided in the winter of 1923 that Ruth should attend the Colarossi Art School in Paris (Harmsen 1980, 85). Ruth, on holiday from her studies in Paris, painted a portrait of her aunt Edith at this time which echoes the sentiment that this woman was both an anchor and a comfort to not only Bertha, but perhaps to the whole family group. The centrally positioned figure, her level gaze fixed at the spectator, her arms protectively embracing the curves of a sleeping cat on her lap, creates a sense of calmness and quietness. This is enhanced by the composition that is composed of soft curves and warm, earthy colours.

During this time Edith arranged for a number of Bertha's works to be shipped to England from South Africa for the Empire Exhibition held at Wembley in the summer of 1924. The painting Veld Fire (c 1917) (not illustrated) was exhibited and had probably been painted at Lekkerdraai in about 1917. It was suitably well displayed, according to Bertha, when she and the family went to view it in July 1924 (Harmsen 1980, 90, 91).

In 1924 Bertha, Bury and the younger children moved again to a small villa in Kimpton, a village between Knebworth and Harpenden, which Bury had bought. They renamed this home "Kimpton Hoek" which made them feel closer to their South African home (Harmsen 1980, 82). It is here, Harmsen states, that Bertha began paying attention to her own painting again, encouraged as usual by Edith. Bertha appears to have recorded this home in a painting entitled Harpenden (c1925) (Fig 76) although an inscription on the back may suggest that it was in fact Edith's work. However, it is far more in keeping with Bertha's other work at this time such as

Rubber factory, Harpenden (Fig.72). In January 1924, she sent two pictures to the Salon in Paris, namely Opal valley (nd) catalogued as View towards Swaziland, and the Libertas tondo (nd). The latter was rejected but the former accepted (Harmsen 1980, 88).

When the family moved to Kimpton, Bertha reluctantly agreed that Rosamund could attend Saint George's School as a boarder (Harmsen 1980, 89). Bertha soon began planning for Rosamund's further education. Rosamund had expressed a keen interest in becoming a sheep farmer, much to Bertha's amusement, and she applied to an agricultural college for that purpose. However, this plan was never realised.

One of the two Swazi boys, Joseph, had become very unhappy and was sent back to Bonnefoi. The other, John, seemed to adjust well and stayed in the foreign environment (Harmsen 1980, 89). They had both accompanied the Everards to England and had attended the Harpenden Church School. Everard Haden says that on their eventual return to South Africa, the workers were very jealous of the two young boys and Joseph was murdered. John was given poison that drove him temporarily mad. He became a domestic employee on the Bonnefoi farm. He and his wife were both killed, believed murdered, in an accident with his horse and cart (pers com LEH 2001).

By 1924, the English adventure was beginning to pall, Bertha was in no mood to paint, distracted as she was by domestic trivia and expressed some homesickness in a letter to Charles: "... this is not my home country and I shall never be moved by it as I am by my native land. But all these excuses point no doubt to the fact that I am not up to painting just now." (Harmsen 1980, 90).

However, in the summer of 1924, both Bertha and her two daughters painted the surrounding English countryside. Rosamund had no formal artistic training but had been guided by the family (Harmsen 1980, 94). Rosamund's style is dissimilar to both Bertha and Ruth's, although there appears to be a distinct similarity to Edith's more decorative style. Bertha's painting of this period, for example Cornfields, Kimpton (1924) (Fig.73), is reminiscent of Maggie Laubser's well-known work of that period, except that Bertha's work does not contain

any human figures.

Bertha spent some months in Paris to secure a studio for Ruth, while Edith stayed at Kimpton to look after Sebastian. During Bertha's absence, Edith arranged the promotion of Bertha's art. She sent a painting to a large international group exhibition at the prestigious Goupil's Art Gallery in London, and commissioned the Medici Society, Publishers of Fine Art Reproductions, to reproduce another, perhaps Peace of Winter (1909) (Fig. 37), for distribution (Harmsen 1980, 98).

Bertha found a suitable flat for Ruth in Paris. While away, Bertha, as was her custom, wrote letters to Kimpton with instructions that they were to be forwarded to Bonnefoi. During this time Bertha expressed her admiration for the work of Vincent van Gogh, and also Henri Matisse and Georges Braque. She found Paul Cézanne's work "clumsy technically" (Harmsen 1980, 96). It may be speculated that Bertha's preference for a more finished appearance in painting is noticeable in her disregard of Cézanne's work, while the spontaneity and expressiveness of the former two artists suggests a predisposition in these areas. Generally, Bertha found Paris, the museums and the culture stimulating, and expressed regret at having shut herself off from "kindred spirits rather too much" in the past (Harmsen 1980, 96).

Bertha was loath to leave Ruth alone in Paris, and decided that it would be in everyone's best interests that the two girls should share the flat. Disregarding Rosamund's expressed desire to study agriculture, she was enrolled at a music school in Paris (Harmsen 1980, 102, 117). Bury, Rosamund and Sebastian joined Bertha and Ruth at the flat in Paris in 1925. John Mkhabela returned to Bonnefoi. Edith stayed on in England, visiting family and old friends who lived in Oxford. Kimpton Hoek was auctioned on 23 April, 1925 (Harmsen 1980, 104).

During the 1920s the art capital of the western world was considered by many to be Paris, although this changed after World War 2 when there was a shift of artistic focus and innovation to America (Gardner 1970, 713). Modernism had been established in Europe in the wake of the Impressionists' experiment with increasingly literal optical experiences, the subjection of sculptural form to optical illusion, and the reassertion of the picture plane



(Greenberg in Risatti 1990, 14). Although World War 1 had affected life and artistic expression, there was a tremendous surge in creative energy as seen in the work of the Post-Impressionists, Expressionists, Cubists, and de Stijl and even in the nihilism of Dada (Gardner 1970, 697- 725). Innovative and avant-garde artists such as Braque, Picasso and Matisse were again at work there, as were many others of equal calibre. There were a number of acclaimed art schools, ateliers and art teachers in Paris during the 1920s (McConkey 1995).

Interestingly, many young artists from South Africa visited Paris during this time (such as Strat Caldecott, Clément Sènèque, Maud Sumner and Cecil Higgs), but no mention is made by the Everard's of their meeting, nor any acknowledgement of their existence (Harmsen 1980, 104-106). Harmsen remarks that although they did not see each other's work, there was a similarity of style between these South African artists who while acknowledging the work of the Fauves, Expressionists and "decorative style of the Ecole de Paris of the twenties" and paying tribute to the older masters, especially Cézanne and van Gogh all "vigorously developed these styles to suit their individual adventurous temperaments" (Harmsen 1980, 104-106).

Typically, Bertha did not find life in the cramped surroundings of the flat, nor the crowded busyness of the city environment conducive to painting. She became unhappy, tense and irritable, lacked energy and self-confidence and missed her "native haunts" (Harmsen 1980, 107). However, Bertha's mood soon took an upswing, perhaps because of her appreciation of the change in weather (Bertha's letters often make reference to weather conditions) and by the news of the prospect of finding platinum on the farm in Carolina, and the promise of financial gain. The latter may have alleviated any financial concerns she may have been experiencing, as suggested by her letter expressing her dismay at having to be "careful" (TAG undated letter no 6 from Europe) and "short of money" (TAG undated letter no 24 from Harpenden). The prospecting came to nothing. She expressed her disappointment about this in a letter to her husband but resolved to stay on in Europe for the benefit of the children (Harmsen 1980, 107).

While in Paris, Bertha visited Chantilly Woods on painting excursions. They spent about three months, from June to September, at La Falaise, Bruneval, Saint Jouin-sur-mer, Seine

Inferieure and Normandy where the family were able to escape from the heat of the Paris summer. They rented a “funny old castellated house” beside white chalk cliffs, with a terrace overlooking the pebble beaches and sea below (Harmsen 1980, 109). While Bertha, Bury and Sebastian were there, Edith looked after the two girls in the Paris flat, joining them later to celebrate Ruth’s twenty-first birthday together. This appears to have been a happy period for Bertha, during which time she may have felt secure enough to experiment in a more boldly expressionistic way than she had before.

During this summer, family and friends came to visit and they enjoyed a varied social life. Bertha also found the time to paint scenes of the coastline, and later the wheat fields in Normandy. That Bertha’s painting during this time showed a distinct shift towards a more expressive, Fauvist style Harmsen suggests was as a token of “unequivocal homage to the late van Gogh” (Harmsen 1980, 113). This research suggests a somewhat less strong indebtedness to van Gogh, and perhaps a greater similarity to the work of Derain. However, the greater expressionist technique and Fauvist colour is evident in the Bruneval series.

In August of 1925, Bertha arranged for Ruth to go to Salisbury, England, to take lessons in wood-block cutting with Erik Hesketh Hubbard, whom she described in glowing terms (Harmsen 1980, 115). This opinion was later to change drastically when Ruth and Erik developed a relationship, which was to end acrimoniously. Bertha’s disapproval of the relationship is evident in her letters to Edith (TAG undated letter no 95 from England). The rest of the family remained at Bruneval during this time. In the autumn of that year, they returned to the flat in Paris while Edith rented accommodation nearby. A studio was found for Ruth in October, and she was delighted to learn that one of her paintings had been accepted for exhibition at the 1925 *Salon d’Automne*. Bertha had also submitted but hers was not accepted (Harmsen 1980, 118).

While Edith, Ruth, and Rosamund were happy to remain in France, both Bertha and Sebastian longed to return to South Africa. But in the spring of 1926, Bertha, Edith and Ruth made a pilgrimage to Delville Wood where Bertha painted some of her most significant work. Edith and Bertha found accommodation at Longueval, a village nearby that had been totally

destroyed during the war (Harmsen 1980, 120,121).

Ruth found the Delville Wood environment too distressing and returned to Paris where she concentrated on portraiture. She painted a portrait of her mother entitled *L'art d'Aujourd'hui* (1926), referring to the magazine that Bertha was reading. Bertha found it pleasing and flattering. She commented in a letter to Edith that “it’s as well that she can flatter. I think that she will have to get her living by portraits in South Africa. She enjoys painting them and is going to be very skilful about it” (Harmsen 1980, 129). Ruth also painted a portrait of her godmother and of Sebastian. Later Ruth visited England, where she stayed at Braemore in order to paint at New Forest near Salisbury (Harmsen 1980, 129).

Bertha hurt her knee in a street accident in Paris, and was confined to a wheelchair. Her letters to Edith at this time convey her sense of frustration and irritability at this confinement and dependence on others, especially the luckless Bury, who was often at the receiving end of Bertha’s sharp tongue. It also transpired that there was little to be done about her knee and that she would always suffer some discomfort from this injury (undocumented letters, TAG, 2001). They soon left Paris to join Ruth in Braemore, England, before the long voyage home.

It is evident that during Bertha’s sojourn in Europe, she imbibed certain aspects of the Post-Impressionist style. Her handling of paint and colour became less descriptive and more expressive. Her choice of landscape as subject matter, with its unusual composition, becomes more clearly a metaphor for herself. Her perception of landscape is elevated from a descriptive level and this, combined with the more tentative, experimental approach in both composition and colour, suggest a direction which may have borne greater fruits had she shown less susceptibility to negative criticism, less desire to conform to social and familial pressures and been able to conserve more energy for painting.

After an absence of four years, Bertha, Rosamund, Sebastian and Bury left England to return to South Africa by ship on the 24<sup>th</sup> of September, 1926. Edith and Ruth returned to Paris. Bertha felt that their departure was long overdue and wrote to her sister expressing her readiness as follows: “Soon I shall leave England and somehow I feel this is really my last of

her. England is not for me. I must go home wherever that may be. It certainly isn't England." (Harmsen 1980, 131).

Bertha found it very difficult to settle down again in the Eastern Transvaal. She missed both Edith and Ruth, and her relationship with Charles had been severely strained after such a long separation. She had idealised her life at Bonnefoi and may have found the reality of it intolerable. She disliked her in-laws and a bitter animosity grew between them. Bertha was also dissatisfied with the state of affairs at the farm missions. She found the Africans "ungrateful, insolent and lazy". She also felt that the farms had been "grossly neglected in her absence, and she felt compelled to channel all her energy into putting things right at Bonnefoi and Lekkerdraai" (Harmsen 1980, 137). She was also infuriated by the rejection of what she considered her best work, by Charles, his family and the South African art critics, whose unappreciative and even hostile response to her modern style (Harmsen 1980, 137) was in contrast to the acceptance of her work that she had experienced in Europe.

It was around this time that Bertha experienced a severe crisis of faith. Her letters to Edith at this time reveal the severity of her class and racial prejudice and acknowledge what she felt to be her incomprehension of the nature of religion. After experiencing the added embarrassment of being instructed not to continue with her mission work after fourteen years of "struggle and expense" (TAG letter no 177 dated 1929), learning the native language and building schools and a church she wrote an impassioned letter to Edith, her confidante and spiritual adviser. In it she denounced her faith and expressed her resolve not to have anything more to do with the "ungrateful" blacks and that they should "rot in their own ignorance" (TAG undated letter no 172).

As Arnold (2000, 56) says, Bertha's eyes and temperament responded to the spaces of Africa, but the community within which she lived stifled her, drawing desperate words from her: "... oh! Edie I am so sick of fighting these lazy stupid people. It is often difficult in Europe but oh here!! I am filled with misery, utterly broken down. I can't go on struggling against it anymore." (Arnold 2000, 56).



Bertha quite deliberately did not allow herself time to paint during a subsequent three-year hiatus of disillusionment and depression. Harmsen (1980, 142) states that in December of 1927 she threatened “never to show any more pictures anywhere in Africa” and suggests that it was not until 1928 that she found renewed enthusiasm for her work, once there was a promise that Ruth would return to South Africa for a holiday and Edith’s homecoming.

There is little evidence of Edith painting in Europe. Bertha’s depression and inability to paint in Edith’s absence might have encouraged her sister’s early return. During the course of 1929, Edith returned to South Africa and settled in to a cottage on Bonnefoi (Harmsen 1980, 147).

Not long after her return to South Africa, Bertha persuaded her husband and Rosamund to accompany her on a visit to the Natal Art School in Durban. She was invited to write an article on her artistic experiences during her tour of the continent. This essay was entitled Modern Art and was published in the school’s magazine The Common Room after a lecture she gave on the 16<sup>th</sup> of May, 1931 (Harmsen 1980, 131).

When she returned to South Africa in 1928, Ruth elected to paint landscapes, as well as portraits of family and friends (Harmsen 1980, 142,143). During 1928 and early 1929, Bertha did not feel inclined to paint, but encouraged by Edith, she again submitted work to various group shows. Despite her forswearing ever to exhibit anywhere in Africa again, she apparently arranged for the exhibition of her work in Johannesburg and Durban in 1928 (Harmsen 1980, 142). Reviews of the Johannesburg show were marginally more positive, if patronising.

In a letter to Edith from Lekkerdraai in May 1929, Bertha expressed her intention to paint again. Ruth often accompanied Bertha on these excursions. There is a distinct similarity between Bertha and Ruth’s work, attributable to the fact that they may have painted together and Bertha’s usual hesitancy after not painting for a long period of time. Notably absent is any further bold experiment with the Fauvist style she had adopted in France. Harmsen states that the period 1929 to 1936 was a productive one for Bertha and revealed a more confident approach (Harmsen 1980, 145).

Both Ruth and Rosamund abandoned plans of returning to Paris and settled into active farm life (Harmsen 1980, 146). Rosamund, the more gregarious of the two sisters, initiated and encouraged many of the social engagements at Bonnefoi. Ruth met William Denholm Haden, whom she married in November 1929. They settled at Thurlaston, a neighbouring farm to Bonnefoi. Ruth continued to focus on landscape, with the occasional still-life and portrait (Harmsen 1980, 149). In September 1930, she gave birth to their son Bryan and in 1937, to Leonora (Addleson 2000, 2).

Edith, meanwhile, appears to have immersed herself in the promotion of the Everard Group. She encouraged Bertha to paint and assisted in the school, mission and church activities (Harmsen 1980, 149). Perhaps as a result of being close to both her daughters and her sister Bertha's interest in painting was renewed. She also seems to have been inspired to invest energy in church building, with the assistance of her family. In 1930 Bertha converted the original store on Bonnefoi into a chapel called Saint Francis in the Veld. Ruth decorated the altar with a triptych, Bertha made candlesticks out of the hubs of wagon wheels and Edith made a banner depicting Saint Francis (Harmsen 1980, 158).

The year 1931 appears to have been a memorable one for the Everard Group, as they became known, with Edith having coined the name, as the group gained recognition through shows of their collected work (Harmsen 1980, 158). They participated in various shows in South Africa. Edith was usually responsible for the publicity. According to Harmsen, Edith also delivered a lecture entitled "On the Inwardness and aims of some modern movements in art" at an exhibition in which they participated, in Johannesburg in 1931 (Harmsen 1980, 158, 160). Judging from the critical response to the work of Bertha and the Everard Group's, as well as that of other artists who were working in the modern style, it may reasonably be said that during the 1930s, their work began to gain recognition (Harmsen 1980, 162).

Despite the furore in the art world following the introduction of a modernist-inclined style to the largely conservative South African art public, Bertha remained largely unscathed, busying herself with farming affairs. In 1932 she offered to design and build a church for the (white)

Anglican community in Carolina. The Bishop of Johannesburg consecrated the building on the 17<sup>th</sup> of April, 1932 (Harmsen 1980, 164). With great difficulty and a limited budget, Bertha arranged for the stone and thatch required for its construction, and interior decoration. Its plan is based on a cross with apsidal ends, and has a lych-gate with a bell. Local quartzite was used for the construction, with the floor a mosaic-like marble shale. There is a raised altar in the east end made of pale grey soapstone, with recesses for the pulpit and lectern.

Besides the church, Bertha designed and built, with locally quarried and fired yellowish pink clay bricks, a store for someone named Dhadaby. This building still exists, although it has been altered and the original brickwork, for which Bertha oversaw the quarrying of the clay and firing of the bricks, is now covered with lime wash. She also hoped to build a hydro or hotel (Harmsen 1980, 167) but again her somewhat extravagant dream did not materialise.

Charles had been progressively buying shares in the surrounding farmland. It appears that during the 1930s Bertha built a homestead at Boschoek, where she and Bury lived during the winter months. Charles, now in his eighties, and Rosamund stayed at Bonnefoi while Sebastian farmed Lekkerdraai. Ruth was still based at Thurlaston, where she painted. Bertha developed the agricultural potential of Boschoek and Mica Ridge, while Bury and John Mkhabela set up a store in a disused garage on the farm. Edith read, wrote and painted (Harmsen 1980, 167). These facts suggest that Bertha and Charles lived separately and that Bertha was still actively engaged in farming. During this time, Edith bemoaned the fact that Bertha did not have time to paint (Harmsen 1980, 166) and Harmsen suggests that it was unlikely that Bertha painted at all between 1932 and 1934. However, there are some sketches of scenes on the farms that she may have done during this time (Harmsen 1980, 176). Three of what Harmsen describes as her “largest and most impressive works” (Harmsen 1980, 176) were made between 1934-1938/39.

Bertha, by now well into her sixties, painted one more large Lekkerdraai landscape and a small panel Four young trees (nd) (Fig.118) (Harmsen1980, 179). The large painting is referred to as Lekkerdraai 2 (Fig.117). Harmsen suggests that Bertha was on the verge of exploring new formal possibilities, but that instead of pursuing this, she chose to abandon

painting. This painting appears to be the last major work in Bertha's oeuvre (Harmsen 1980, 179-180). Although Bertha no longer painted, she still, however, participated in group shows. During World War 2 (1938-1945), Bertha was responsible for the management of the farms (Harmsen 2000, 32).

In 1935 Sebastian and Rosamund took up flying in Carolina, despite their farming and other social commitments (Harmsen 1980, 181). With financial assistance from Bury, they acquired their own small aircraft, a Puss Moth. This facilitated their journeys between the farms and cities. In 1939, Rosamund met, and later married Nicolaas Steenkamp, a learner pilot whom she had taught to fly, having achieved a diploma in instruction. However, she became a widow in 1942 when Nicolaas died from typhoid in Durban.

Rosamund continued flying for the shuttle service between South Africa and Cairo and later joined the Air Transport Auxiliary. Rosamund learned to fly the earliest jet aircraft, the Meteor 111, in 1945. In March 1946, while delivering a Spitfire XIV, she crashed at high speed and was killed instantly (Harmsen 1980, 186). Charles, Rosamund's aged father, mourned her untimely death. She appears to have been especially close to him (pers com LEH 2001). Bertha, initially stricken by this news, later appears to have lavished her affection and care on the rearing of her grandchildren, Bryan and Leonora Haden.

There is no decisive moment when Bertha stopped painting. Perhaps overwhelmed by the circumstances surrounding her daughter's death, she suffered a severe loss of confidence in her artistic ability. Charles had died in 1946, but apparently Bertha did not attend the funeral. Leonora suggests that Bertha's absence was as a result of her poor health and the fact that she was on the Natal south coast at the time (pers com LEH 2001).

During the late 1940s and 50s, Bertha and her entourage restlessly moved from place to place, attending to her grandchildren's schooling and education. They stayed at, among other places, Mbabane, Mooi River, Caversham, Johannesburg, Pietermaritzburg and Lourenço Marques and on the Natal south coast. In 1954 Bertha and Bury returned to Bonnefoi where Bertha set about building two more churches "for the black people" (Harmsen 1980, 198) in



Carolina and Badplaas. Her resolve to avoid any further association with the spiritual welfare of black people seems to have dissipated.

Edith stayed for some time in Pietermaritzburg, being in charge of Leonora's welfare at university, but she later returned to Bonnefoi. Ruth had been busy with farming activities, horse breeding and painting on the farm Riverlands (Harmsen 1980, 186). Bertha was said to have begun a painting in Pietermaritzburg but this is now lost. It is not known if she completed it (Everard Haden, 2000, 32).

In her ninetieth year, Edith had begun work on a volume of religious poems. She completed them and they were accepted for publishing but as a result of her death after a stroke in Carolina at the age of ninety-two, on the 21<sup>st</sup> of June, 1962 (Harmsen 1980, 203), her poems were never published. Unlike Bertha, she appears to have remained creatively involved almost up to her death. One may assume that Edith's death must have been a significant loss to Bertha. However, Bertha was by now ill herself, with lapses of memory and largely confined to a wheelchair. The news of her sister's death was apparently softened by her lapses of memory, although she only outlived her by three years. She died in 1965 also at the age of ninety-two, in Carolina (Addleson 2000, 17). The sisters are buried side by side in the Carolina church graveyard, as are Charles and Bury (pers com LEH 2001).

## **CHAPTER 2: Relationships: family, marriage, children, friends and letters**

The way in which Bertha conducted her relationships in later life may have been formed very early on in life. In the absence of her mother, she relied heavily on her older sister Edith to provide her with a sense of stability. This relationship formed the core of her sense of self and well-being. This relationship with Edith never flagged, as the numerous letters to her attest. She wrote to her sister almost on a daily basis when they were apart, and these letters have formed the major part of this and a significant part of Harmsen's research. Harmsen (1980) has provided this research with valuable information concerning the documentation of Bertha's oeuvre.

In her letters to Edith, Bertha revealed her deepest insecurities, admitted to the failure of some of her projects, and expressed her desire or inability to paint. She addressed all her letters to her sister with great affection and took heed of her advice. Her thoughts are rarely censored and many of her letters are poorly punctuated. The sentences often ramble in a long stream and suggest the flow of her unconscious thought patterns. Many letters contain contradictory information about her view of things. As many of them are undated, it is difficult to point to a specific date in her change of attitude, but it appears that while her early letters (before 1922) are generally optimistic, after her return from Europe (1926), they tend to be more negative in tone.

Bertha's return to South Africa after an absence of six years was not the happy one she had hoped for. She experienced a severe crisis in her Anglican faith and was hurt by the failure of her mission work and by the rejection of her attempts in this area by the Church. This extract from a letter to Edith is quoted at length as it gives a fair indication of both her letter style and a glimpse at her bleaker moments:

I don't think natives have souls or at least not many of them and if they have they're not worth bothering over. There I have said it. Why worry over these silly.... I don't believe any of it. Dirty degraded lazy wholly unspiritual why worry over them. God creates them as he does so many apparently wasted material. They have their uses, but I cannot feel that at this present stage of development they can be part of a Christian household. Only a few of them and

those are the ones that make their own personal effort....I don't believe in anybody having a soul unless a monstrous effort is made on the part of the creature. No soul exists in the vast majority of human beings...No soul in thousands of respectable folk. One can only hope that they will make reasonably good manure when they depart this life. I shall not do more myself unless I exert myself and grow at least a tiny soul here and now. I often fear that my poor seedling soul will wilt and die, it gets so poorly watered....and that I have entered into this fury of hate towards the deadly lethargy of the average man. I feel my poor seedling soul has less chance than ever. But it is impossible for me to believe in my fellow man and their souls just because I wish to grow one for myself. There is the fact. I do not care for my neighbours and I do not care if they only become so much manure after death. I often think this one life is far too good for them I cannot make myself desire *anything whatever* for them in a future state. This is I suppose complete hatred. Edie dear you will be agonised by what I say but I must purge my heart of deceit. It is just *vanity* for me to go on with mission work. I do not really care for all these dirty deceitful lazy unlovely native brats. I am always glad when they die. I do not want them to be born. I wish that they could cease to reproduce themselves as indeed I wish the greater number of white people could do also. What good are they. None. A great hindrance to progress. Unless they do work which is just muscular but even so I would far rather intelligent energetic white people could do it. Well fortunately for the world I am not an over Lord. Oh! How I *detest* people. These natives are so well treated by S [Sebastian] and also by me. They see our goods *rot* rather than lift a hand to help. They don't care a damn for us and I don't care a *damn* for them. I am sick of the whole crowd. May they rot in their own ignorance. I shall just give up the whole concern. Never will I work for them anymore...Therefore I am no Christian. I *cannot* love my enemy. I *cannot*. I wish him dead. I wish him non-existent (TAG undated letter no 172).

The racist language in this letter needs to be balanced by the fact that Bertha had taken on an enormous project in "good faith" to redeem what she self-righteously perceived as the "heathen" in her midst, educate them and furnish them with sound (Victorian) morals. That this project was ultimately a failure was a blow to her already crippled self-esteem. She perhaps explains her actions by saying "All human effort is valuable if it is directed Godward. That sounds very cheap but I mean perhaps more than that." (TAG undated letter no177).

Edith was a respected headmistress of Eunice Girls' School in Bloemfontein, a devoted and sometimes controversial teacher, her new ideas often causing conflict among those accustomed to a more traditional approach (Harrison 1980, 62-63). English was the predominant language of instruction at many schools in South Africa for much of the 19<sup>th</sup>

century (Saunders, 1994, 111). Edith was the only female member of the family that Bertha could not dominate. Edith created her own world and circle of friends (Addleson 2000, 33). She was a prolific poet, and a deeply religious Anglican. She was the most prolific painter of the Everard Group, drawing inspiration for her watercolours from nature, with a strong decorative sense and the use of gestural marks. As an artist, Edith's work did not challenge Bertha as she regarded Edith's watercolour painting as somewhat amateurish. Watercolours were frequently used as part of preliminary observation sketches, as a form of drawing, and although "estimable within that limitation... clearly in a second class" (Bayard 1981, 2). This fact did not prevent Bertha from frequently seeking Edith's advice on artistic as well as spiritual and family matters.

Bertha's relationship with her husband Charles seems to have been a complex one. While Everard Haden suggests that their marriage may have been a combination of convenience and love (pers com LEH 2000), it may have provided Bertha with an anchor that she both needed and objected to. It may also have provided her with some financial security and social status which, as a woman of nearly thirty when she married, she may have needed to elevate her from the perception of herself as a spinster.

Charles, while financing Bertha and the children's travels and education, seems largely to have been absent from their lives. The diminutive Bertha must have been a force to be reckoned with, as he rarely appears to have gainsaid her decisions. Bertha made the decisions, coerced, cajoled and perhaps at times manipulated those who stood in the way of her desires. In a letter written after her sojourn in Europe, Bertha wrote: "C [Charles] has never considered me in the least. Now I insist that I get properly treated." (TAG letter no 170 dated 28.1.1928 from Bonnefoi).

She found Charles and his family restrictive and uncultured in the arts. He did not understand her painting. The four years that they were separated while Bertha and the family lived in Europe succeeded only in widening any growing gap between them. Her early letters to him from Europe are affectionate and implore him to join them, but he never did. Bertha's dislike and harsh criticism of the farm manager and his wife did not fall on sympathetic ears

with Charles. She therefore petulantly accused him of being disloyal and unconcerned about her welfare: "Charlie of course blames me for everything, and is always most disloyal to me. Today I feel almost sinful as I almost hate Charlie. He has been hanging on the necks of the Cowper's all day." (TAG letter no 16 dated 21.3.1917 from Bonnefoi). However, during Bertha's sickness, his gentleness and concern were evident: "Charlie has been very kind to me during this attack and even got up at night to make my fire and will not hear of my travelling second class as I had intended." (TAG letter no 47 dated 1917, from Bonnefoi). According to Everard Haden, Bertha contracted meningitis after the birth of one of her children (pers com LEH 2001).

Bertha's views on sexuality may have been informed by the forthright observations of sex in the work of Havelock Ellis (1859-1939) and Edward Carpenter (1844-1929). Of Carpenter she said:

Many of his ideas on marriage are like mine but there is too much thought given to purely sex enjoyment. This I feel is a mistake for if we give ourselves up to sex we cannot be doing other things. True the subject is ever present with us and a terrible nuisance to most of us but is the fact that it is a nuisance our own fault?... Why should life-long faithfulness be thought a virtue. It is much more often a deadly sin because it is a deadly lie. Of course nothing can be bettered until the state recognises the position of women and endows mothers and children...I wish I had read earlier in my life books by people who have treated the subject in a really profound manner (Arnold 2000, 62).

Despite her misgivings about the institution of marriage she was determined that her daughters should marry, with someone whom she felt was suitable. However, as Arnold says, her views on marriage indicate that she thought deeply about the plight of women and the compromises forced on them, as is evident in this extract quoted at length in Arnold (2000). Concerned about an unhappy liaison between Ruth and Erik Hesketh Hubbard, she wrote in a letter to Edith on 1 February, 1928:

If Ruth had enough money of a secure kind I think I should advise not marrying. Personally I think the ideal thing is to have one or two children by someone of outstanding mentality, and remain single. That is what I should prefer and I think quite a number of women also, only they are too timid to say so much less act...The age for husbands has gone, I am sure of it. These life long alliances are



intolerable. One does not need them either. Directly women realise that they are themselves sufficient for the family they will then only then begin to develop, cast off this foolish position of slavery, quite needless if only the world would recognise the fact and make it respectable. I fear in my day it will not come but eventually it must. The young ones are trying to wake up and the fact that the old conventions are man made are terribly irksome to intellectual and progressive women. The one thing against my ideas is that the world is still so shocked but then the world is shocked at everything progressive except science. Look at my case. I should be far happier unmarried. I find Charlie intolerable and shall find him more so as time goes by...There is no intellectual companionship between us, no love, quite the reverse, only a sort of cramping respectability. Now having lived under that for so long I cannot get work and so am a slave but I ought to be able to work. I ought to have kept in the line with wage earning all my life and so kept my freedom. Alas for women. They have such a poor chance always being inferior physically. All we can do is see that our grand daughters are better equipped especially mentally... You will say this is all anti-Christian. I could argue at great length that it is not. Nowhere is it stated that our marriage laws are approved of by Him...No Edie, a woman should have children by careful selection and nothing else, a companion she likes, just anybody, woman or man. But her children should be by other means. So I think and believe (Arnold 2000, 60, 61).

That Charles felt excluded from the closely-knit women in his family is suggested by Bertha's comment in a letter:

...poor K [Bury] finds C [Charles] an awful bear these days. I don't mind, he used to be quite as bad in the old days. I am glad I don't get all his temper...

...but it is useless for me to talk, my advice is never asked and never taken and C [Charles] never tells me anything. How can he expect friendship from me. He won't be a friend. Let him remain an outsider then. He is angry because we are buying sheep. How does he expect us to pay our expenses if we have no stock to feed on those acres of land. Ridiculous. Perfectly ridiculous (TAG letter no 170 dated 28.1.1928 from Bonnefoi).

Charles died at the age of ninety-three in 1946, after a short illness. Letters to the family about his death reveal that he was well-liked by many, and that he would be happy to be reunited with Rosamund, as he had never fully realised that she had died (TAG letter no 131 dated 3.11.1946).

Perhaps as Bertha was largely denied a mother's attentions in early childhood, she devoted

herself to her children, as Arnold says: "...finding in their needs and education, her reasons for being" and: "In meeting her largely self-imposed responsibilities, Bertha created a world that conflicted with art, creating a schism between the private and public components of her personality. The conflict brought ill health, depression, bouts of self-hatred, and an acute lack of self confidence." (Arnold 2000, 58).

Arnold also notes that the more Bertha felt confined, the more fiercely she devoted herself to her children and that in them she sought emotional security and she began to project onto them all her own aspirations (Arnold 2000, 59). They, in turn, never rebelled directly against her sometimes overbearing and meddling behaviour.

Bertha managed her children and grandchildren's affairs with what may be termed autocratic doggedness. She believed that what she did was always in their best interests. She scorned public education and taught them at home. She was a strict and demanding mother who believed that children should be physically active and strong, and that their education should include the arts. Everard Haden remembers that Bertha's children were made to swim even in the bitterly cold highveld winters, in order to improve their immune system. Possibly as a result, all three became very ill one year, and thereafter Bertha was less enthusiastic about this toughening-up method (pers com LEH 2001).

Although Bertha often made astute assessments of the discrimination inherent in the dominantly patriarchal discourses (Arnold 2000, 61,62) she seemed to be unaware of her own acquiescence to societal convention. This is manifest in her consistent self-sacrifice to the rearing of her children, an obligation to family being paramount that severely curtailed pursuit of self-fulfilment.

Bertha's relationship with her oldest daughter Ruth seems to have been exceptionally close. Bertha made demands on her time and appears to have expected Ruth to reciprocate her love. Ruth's heart condition may have been a cause for Bertha's somewhat over-protective concern but it appears that Ruth's loyalty to her mother was sincere. Bertha's description of Ruth as a "tragedy queen" (TAG undated letter no 6) and her concern about her health (TAG letter no

25 dated 4.3.1924) and Ruth's bouts of depression suggest that they were quite similar emotionally. Ruth appears to have been more reserved than her more gregarious sister Rosamund.

Bertha appears to have lived vicariously through Ruth. She developed Ruth's latent artistic talent in the hope that she would become a professional artist. In a letter in 1928 she wrote: "Ruth has grown in many ways remarkably like me tho' she is much superior in many ways. Sometimes I have an odd feeling that Ruth is me, very peculiar (I have no such feeling about the other two)." (Arnold 2000, 62).

It was partly in the desire to promote Ruth's artistic talent that Bertha decided to go to Europe in 1922 to further her daughter's education. Her own objections to the Slade soon became Ruth's, and so she was sent to Paris to study. Later, she wrote to Ruth from South Africa describing landscapes that she hoped Ruth would paint on her return, as she had no energy or time during 1928-1930 to paint. She fought against Ruth's relationship with Hubbard, whom she thought quite incompatible. She celebrated with her achievements and empathised with her disappointments. In an undated letter to Edith, she wrote: "Ruth is such a tragedy queen, it kills me to think of all she will suffer and in deed does suffer" and later "she cries so terribly it breaks my heart" (TAG undated letter no 6).

Bertha approved of Ruth's husband Denholm Haden, and doted on their children Bryan and Leonora. In return, Ruth remained at her mother's side until her death, whereafter she managed the farms. After Ruth's death, Everard Haden, despite her own disintegrating marriage and a family of four children, saw to the promotion of her grandmother's work and the winding up of the family estate. The strong bond between this generation of Everard women was established.

This bond does not appear to have been as strong in the case of Rosamund. Rosamund seems to have been less inclined towards her mother, favouring the company of her brother and father on her return to South Africa. One can assume that there was some rivalry between the sisters. Bertha wrote to Ruth: "I think she [Rosamund] is rather hurt because you never



mention wanting to see her.” (TAG undated letter no 4).

Rosamund may have experienced some jealousy at what she perceived to be Ruth and Bertha’s close relationship. Despite the fact that Rosamund was happy at Eunice School, in the interests of Ruth’s education she was uprooted and taken to a new school in England. Again this was repeated when Rosamund was encouraged to study music in Paris. It is remarkable that Rosamund seemed to adjust so well each time, but not surprising that there may have been some sibling rivalry or jealousy between the sisters. Rather than compete against Ruth in painting, Rosamund appears to have largely disregarded her artistic talent and pursued other areas where she could excel. It is significant that Rosamund’s painting style was closer to that of her beloved aunt Edith than to Ruth or Bertha’s. Apparently seeking the affirmation she may have lacked from her mother and sister, Rosamund sought friendships with those outside her immediate family circle and with men of whom Bertha frequently disapproved.

Bertha expressed her concern about Rosamund’s relationships as she did with Ruth’s. She wrote:

Roz is just at the age when she really wants to marry and so I have no doubt someone will get her. It seems awful to think that this choice must be final; I wonder whether it ought to be? I am beginning to wonder about this as I do about many things. (TAG letter no 173 dated 10.12.27).

Everard Haden remembers Rosamund being “a tall dignified lady and I was a bit in awe of her. I don’t remember her being demonstrative” (Everard Haden in Addleson 2000, 34). In a major bid for independence and desire to break free from her mother’s persistent interference, she trained as a pilot. As Arnold says: “She literally soared away beyond the clutches of Bertha, escaping her mother’s obsessive attentions, and the jealousy she experienced in her relationship with her sister.” (Arnold 2000, 62). Bertha was not able to attend Rosamund’s funeral in England (pers com LEH 2001). One can speculate that Rosamund’s violent death may have aroused a great deal of remorse in Bertha and it is significant that there is little evidence of her painting seriously after this event.

Sebastian was Bertha's youngest child and only son. Bertha appears to have doted on his every utterance but was dismayed by his lack of interest in artistic or academic advancement. He seems to have been a shy boy; his closest childhood friendships appear to have been with his family, Rosamund a favourite sister. In adulthood he appears quite submissive and reliant on his mother and aunt. As a farmer he settled in the Eastern Transvaal where he managed his father's estates. There was a strong bond between him and his father. Bertha did not approve of his marriage to Julie. As the only son, Charles left his entire estate to Sebastian. Eventually the farms were all sold and Sebastian and his wife Julie retired to Plettenberg Bay (pers com LEH 2001).

Bertha does not appear to have been naturally gregarious. She disliked crowds, preferring to communicate with one or two people rather than a group. She shied away from public gatherings with an almost pathological fear: "the crowds bewilder me" (TAG letter no 15 dated 8.3.1917, from Bonnefoi) and "I just sat in the motor as I don't like crowds and this was a rough crowd of men. Roz was in breeches and so did not look conspicuous. The Boers may think her eccentric but who cares?" (TAG letter no 170 dated 28.1.1928).

Everard Haden states that although Bertha was naturally quite shy of people, once she felt comfortable in their company she would often regale them with stories from her past or anecdotes about her life (Everard Haden 2000, 34). Her dislike of crowds, self-promotion and society in general was perhaps one of the reasons her work remained largely unknown until later in her life. She retreated to the relative security of farm life, preferring the broad open veld and the companionship of her family.

There is little evidence of Bertha having made many lasting friendships with other women, although further study of the undocumented letters may alter this assumption. Dora Champion, whose mother was an acquaintance of the family, remembers that when she was a child, Bertha spent much time chatting to her mother in the village shop and visiting Bonnefoi\*. Bonnefoi was known as a busy meeting place where many people visited so it may be assumed that while Bertha had numerous acquaintances, she may not have had a

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\* This information was revealed in conversation with Champion, a friend of Everard Haden who lives in

significant number of close friends.

One exception in this regard was perhaps Bury, who became her devoted companion. She had joined the staff at Bonnefoi as an assistant, but remained Bertha's most ardent supporter, nurse and companion, despite Bertha's frequent acerbic and dismissive comments. She had her own means and never married, preferring instead to assist with Bertha's family, children and grandchildren. Because of Bertha's frequent illness, dislike of or inability to manage domestic duties, she required the assistance and admiration of someone such as Bury, especially in Edith's absence. That Bury suffered her volatile temperament is a credit to her. It suggests not only compassion and deep loyalty, but also dependence on the family, as she apparently had none of her own. Bury's relationship with Bertha seems to have teetered between friend and servant. After Bertha's death, Bury apparently dated and signed some of Bertha's work in an attempt to clarify and authenticate those that Bertha had not (Harmsen 1980, 221-227).

During their travels, Bertha does not seem to have encouraged interaction with her peers. Close friends, apart from Allerley Glossop (1872-1955), a female artist and friend of both Bertha and Edith (Hillebrand 1986, 87, 88 and Harmsen 1980, 56,) are rarely mentioned. Invitations to lunch or church bazaars were not welcomed (TAG undated letter no 30, and TAG letter no 17 dated 26.3.1917). The family formed the circle in which she functioned at her best. As Arnold says:

The Everard women experienced the affection, loyalty, tensions and jealousies that afflict most families. The bonds that united them tightened and loosened over the years but never snapped; the interactions between sisters Edith and Bertha, and Ruth and Rosamund, between mother and daughters, and aunt and nieces, gained their own momentum, and influenced their painting (Arnold 2000, 59).

For the purposes of this research, many letters and photographs were made available by both the Tatham Art Gallery in Pietermaritzburg and by Everard Haden. Some of these have been

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Pietermaritzburg.

documented, but many still remain to be done. While the documented information in her letters is interesting and often pertains to this research, it must be acknowledged that a significant amount of information still awaits uncovering, in order that a more complete picture of Bertha's thoughts and experiences of life be provided. As Arnold points out, these letters are to be treated with circumspection and offer only a lopsided view of Bertha's nature (Arnold 2000,59). The letters referred to in this thesis are only those which, to date, have been documented at the Tatham Art Gallery. Unsubstantiated information revealed there is not used, or is denoted as such.

Although Arnold considers that Bertha's letters, comprising largely the mundane domestic trivia of her life, are somewhat disappointingly lacking in erudition and imagination when compared, for example, to those of Virginia Woolf or Dorothy Kay (Arnold 2000, 59), Bertha was at times moved to express herself with clarity:

...it has been pouring all night. And this morning is heavy and grey and full of aching dampness. How terribly one feels wetness in this country. Four years of drought obliterated after two days of rain... Terrible old Africa. What a midge man feels in this fierce setting.

...beyond the livid green veld are the jagged blue hills of Swaziland and on one side the nearer krantzes and headlands of the highveld. The only noise is the noise we make ourselves. An overwhelming silence broods over this world when one sits alone (TAG undated letter no 182).

The letters do reveal a humorous, somewhat self-deprecatory aspect of her personality. She wrote: "I am boastful or unsympathetic or self regarding and very unhelpful to other people" (TAG letter no 15 dated 8.3.17). She was often astute in her perception of people, and was known for forthrightness that bordered on bluntness. Bertha did not suffer fools gladly, and her acerbic tone when referring to those whom she perceived as such, was all too often apparent. For example, Bertha wrote: "I told Barend what I thought of such an un-Christian attitude" (TAG undated letter no 112) and "... filled with British wrath in my heart and told old Liesl a few truths but am much too Russian to see it through" (TAG letter no 1 dated 19.2.17). She reveals what she thinks of artists such as Capetonian, George Crosland Robinson (1858-1930) in a letter dated 1921: "...that wicked old Crossley Robinson [sic]



reeks of brandy or whiskey and teaches about as intelligent as a whiskey bottle” (Arnold 2000,59).

Koestler, in chapter 14 on *Learning to Speak* (Koestler 1964, 597-610) suggests that when preparing to say something, whether it is a single sentence or a published lecture, a hierarchy is set in motion. That is, before the verbal hierarchy is set into motion, there is an ideational process of a highly conscious character, an intention or active expectation, which itself is not yet verbalised. In planning a speech, Koestler says, what is said is governed by the character of the audience and by feedback from their anticipated reactions. However in the formation of actual sentences, automations begin to intrude such as grammar, syntax, verbal formulae, clichés, mannerisms and stereotyped turns of phrase. Koestler argues that the way we speak is initiated by un-verbalised intention (Koestler 1964, 598). In other words, we may say what we feel without conscious awareness.

Bertha frequently makes use of the word “ought” in terms of what she should do or would be expected to do. This suggests a struggle between what she desired to do or be and what societal convention imposed upon her. Similarly, Bertha’s letters often express the underlying social discourses of her times in terms of race and accepted behaviour. She described a family outing with Thornton, a male friend, while in Durban as being “all a bit too much....although I liked him very much still I felt always that he spent too much money on us” (TAG undated letter no 155 from Isipingo).

This frequent usage of the word “ought” may be significant to the understanding of Bertha’s life and work. Koestler suggests that the way language is learned affects one’s understanding of the world and that verbal labels can be attached to things or events (perhaps sentiments or feelings?) and that words may be used as a means of getting one’s way, as levers that make things happen. Words then serve both the progressive socialisation and internalisation of behaviour, i.e. communication and inner discourse (Koestler 1964, 600).

This research has found no evidence to suggest that Bertha was in any way different in her language development, and so it may be presumed that her conceptualisation of speech and

its symbols coincide with the above theories. Arnold's suggestion is that Bertha's letters must be viewed with circumspection (Arnold 2000, 59). Yet her letters written to her closest confidant and sister, Edith, are significant in that they seem to reveal the uncensored and therefore perhaps the truest nature of her thoughts and perceptions. As a painter, her artistic vocabulary was informed by the various styles with which she was acquainted. Therefore her hastily made sketches, usually on a small scale and painted with a large brush, appear to be similarly uncensored and perhaps more able to express "honest" images in visual terms.

In contrast to the clarity with which Bertha expresses herself in her letters to Edith, an example of her public writing (Harmsen 1980, 131) appears cumbersome and poorly expressed. She uses excessively long sentences punctuated by commas that make it difficult to follow her intended point. What is apparent is that she reveals more about her own work and ideas than a more objective and arguably more scholarly account of modern art might be thought to demand. The difference between her public and private persona is evident here. Bertha's subjectivity is thinly veiled by a perceived need to conform to social norms. This research suggests that her spoken and visual language suffered from this self-imposed restriction.

This seems to concur with Kerr's statement: "...like verbal language, art employs its own unique metaphorical forms in order to come to an articulation of the deepest bases of our understanding" (Kerr 1985, 43). In other words, he believes that both art and language are governed at inception by basic principles that he refers to as "epistemological bedrock" and that "each comes to terms with the non-referability of the bedrock in its own, metaphorically structured way" (Kerr 1985, 43). It may be argued that the "unique metaphors" are instead less unique than imagined, as Foucault's theories on the History of Language suggests (McHoul and Grace 1993, 11).

Although Bertha's letters are largely devoid of any comments about art, she does describe her meetings with artists Jack (1915-1969) and Jane Heath (1913-1995), Cecil Higgs (1900-1986), Moses Kottler (1892-1977) and George Crosland Robinson, (1858-1930) (Arnold 2000, 59).



Her letters bear witness to a fragile self-esteem, debilitating periods of self-doubt, depression and illnesses that usually followed. Frequently she appeals to Edith for reassurance, and in expressing her own love for Edith and her children constantly, she may be betraying an insecurity and dependency. Bertha acknowledges that her letters are invariably melancholic, which suggests the cathartic nature of her complaints, and therefore they do not give a completely accurate view of her true nature. Bertha wrote:

I write as I think. My letters lately have been one long groan but that is just self-expression. I am groaning. Life is so much more complicated and I have lost a certain interest which youth gives. But if I groan take it lightly. I had ought to be more courageous (TAG letter no 170 dated 28.1.28).

A prolific letter writer, Bertha's letters are at times contradictory, contradictions that with hindsight are more obvious. In some letters, Bertha's flaws and vulnerability appear to be purposely hidden beneath the armour of courageous verbosity.

Bertha's letters reveal a strong ethnocentricity, with a presiding preference, despite her derisive comments about Victorian moral standards, for British rather than South African cultural values. She sometimes expressed racist criticism of the Afrikaners, Jews, Italians and blacks. The latter she patronisingly referred to as "her" blacks, or to farm labourers as "boys" and "girls" (TAG undated letters no 7 and 112). Bertha felt insulted when someone had a "native" sitting in the front of the car, while she had to sit in the back (TAG undated letter no 172).

That Bertha had blacks' welfare at heart does, however, appear certain from these letters: "I wish we could inoculate our poor kaffirs [sic] but there just isn't any stuff for them nor can one buy it for them" (TAG undated letter no 74), and "... my poor brown children. I really do love them. Their joy at getting prayer books is wonderful..." (TAG undated letter no 76). The determination with which she set about trying to conform their culture to her Western principles, reveals the prevalence of the cultural hegemony of Europe. However, evidence of her use of racist language in these letters is brought into question when considering the fact that Bertha entertained Jewish friends in her home on various occasions (pers com LEH 2001). It is suggested that her distinctions were class-based rather than racist.

In a letter to Charles from Italy she wrote: "They [Italian men] are the most indecent nation. Incredibly indecent. A native would be scandalised." (TAG undated letter no 65), and "...the boers are all alike. Spend nothing and desire nothing but a good bank account...they are extraordinarily like the Scotch" and "...just a Jewish type of shop girl good looking but a very large face and square short body. Much more his class. I *am* glad Roz isn't seeing him anymore." (TAG letter no 178 dated 1929). Bertha was very aware of class distinctions (Bertha describes the farm manager and his wife as "ill-bred" and her as appearance as that of "an aged bar maid" (TAG letter no 1 dated 19.02.1917 from Bonnefoi).

The ambivalence she felt about her "true" culture was one that was not unfamiliar among many of her white contemporaries who harboured colonial attitudes. Hattingh (1992 Acta Varia 2: 54-74) suggests that "ethnocentricity is the uncritical preference for one's own mores and culture" and that "ethnocentrism is an attitude of mind characteristic of those who regard their own cultural values as the only valid ones." (Bidney 1959 in Hattingh 1992, 62). Herskovitz (1967 in Hattingh 1992, 68) suggests, however, that ethnocentrism "should not be discarded as an absolutely evil phenomenon as glorifying one's own society fulfils useful social functions - social integration of that group is strengthened as well as the self identity and purposefulness of individuals in the group."

Herskovitz goes on to suggest that ethnocentricity is a rather innocent phenomenon as long as it exists in isolated societies and is not combined with imperialistic ambitions. He notes that this changes radically when incorporated into a philosophy of progress, or when it is incorporated into a nationalistic ideology, when it then becomes dangerous. He maintains that this last type of ethnocentricity spread rapidly during the centuries of colonisation and missionary work, and that to a large extent still exists in bourgeois societies all over the world, including sections of South Africa. Herskovitz adds that the impetus behind the vigour of this Eurocentricism was the notion that the West was the repository of the only true civilisation and of the only true religion, namely Christianity, which resulted in a striving towards the Westernisation of all cultures (Herskovitz in Hattingh 1992, 63).

Herskovitz maintains that this kind of Eurocentricism was linked with ideals of rationality, enlightenment and progress, and that it created a frame of reference in which Western societies' science, technology and industrial power could have been evaluated as being more superior than, for instance, the indigenous societies encountered in Africa, the Americas and Australia. The colonists perceived these people as primitive and inferior, and treated them accordingly (Herskovitz in Hattingh 1992, 63).

Bertha's identification with the above view on European cultural supremacy was flexible. Her attitudes were coloured by circumstance as well as the prevalent ideology of the time. Her letters do not conclusively point to that of a rabid anti-Semitic nor that of cultural supremacy, but rather towards the struggles within herself to find a meaningful point of reference from which she could engage with the fragmented value systems of her contemporary Western society.

### **CHAPTER 3: Selected works: analysis, criticism and exhibitions.**

This chapter gives details of Bertha's childhood, marriage and old age that are relevant to the paintings produced at those times. Selected paintings will be described, with reference to subject matter, composition, and technique. Criticism of specific works will be made with reference and response to Harmsen's observations where necessary. Exhibitions and the reception of Bertha's work will be documented where possible.

In the discussion of Bertha's childhood and her life, it is difficult to separate its events from those of her sister Edith, and later, Bertha's children. As a result of circumstance, they became interdependent and, at times, evidence suggests that their complementary personalities were like the two sides of the same coin. Their lives were so intertwined that it became difficult to explain Bertha's actions without making some reference to those of her sister. This symbiosis is perhaps relevant to the understanding of Bertha's personality. It may also be regarded as influential in comprehending the motivation and perhaps even the subject and interpretation of her work. This strong sense of familial bond between the female members of the family may be seen to be an indication of the future bonds that developed between later members of the Everard Group, with Bertha as the undisputed matriarch.

As children, Edith, the more introspective and older sister, provided an anchor for the more emotional and, at times, erratic Bertha. Edith was a quiet, sensitive and sensible child whereas Bertha was lively and emotional (Harmsen 1980). Yet neither appeared to dominate or overwhelm the other. The traumatic events of their escape to England and subsequent foster care cannot be overlooked as formative events in their psychological make up. Equally, their care by foster parents in the social conditions in late Victorian society under which their young lives were moulded, may also be of significant value in understanding the choices available to them, and their responses to these challenges.

Many of Bertha's paintings were undated and infrequently signed. Sometimes work was signed years after completion, and some posthumously signed by the well-meaning companion Bury. This fact makes accurate chronology of her work difficult. This research

therefore is largely based on the study and chronology made by Harmsen, unless otherwise stated.

In 1894 she attended the esteemed Herkomer School in Bushey (Harmsen 1980, 9). Herkomer painted academic portraits, landscapes, history and genre paintings. Landscape artists such as Mabel Pryde (1871-1918) and Algernon Talmage (1871-1939) attended his school and later became members of the Royal Academy. Some critics condemned Herkomer's work for its dullness, although his teaching was believed to be both demanding in terms of time and attendance, and adventurous too. He demanded complete dedication from his students, while arranging painting excursions where students were accommodated in tents. These experiences were probably very influential on young Bertha as an impressionable, and hitherto fairly restricted and protected young woman. It's probable that it was here she first experienced painting on large canvases on site and making excursions to paint was something she continued to do as long as her health allowed (Harmsen 1980, 9).

Herkomer's teaching was traditional, with emphasis placed on portraiture and drawing from life. He did not encourage a school style, but rather sought to guide the students to find a personal means of expression. Many of the students were considerably well-advanced artists and so the ambience was one of a workshop rather than an institute of instruction (Harmsen 1980, 10). Bertha also learned from Herkomer some novel stage techniques that she encouraged her children to recreate in amateur theatre at Bonnefoi in South Africa. During this time she painted numerous landscapes, such as Water lily pond (1895) (Fig.1), Bridge in a forest (1895) (Fig. 2) and Spring trees (1895) (Fig.3).

Harmsen describes the aquarelle Water lily pond (1895) (Fig. 1) as "clumsily handled and over-decorative, characteristic of a young painter who is still trying to master technique and find a formula through which self-expression may be channelled" (Harmsen 1980, 10). It is a traditional, naturalistic, somewhat romanticised representation of a landscape. Bertha's drawing and compositional skills are evident.

Bridge in a forest (1895) (Fig. 2) Harmsen suggests is technically far more competent in both

style and expression, though “impersonal and unoriginal” but still inhibited by unimportant detail which makes the picture “sentimental and detracts from the overall rather grandiose concept” (Harmsen 1980, 11). The available black-and-white reproduction suggests a more heavy-handed approach than in the aforementioned work, with an uncharacteristic claustrophobic lack of space, and a density of paint that almost obscures the subject itself. Undoubtedly this was a more assertive, confident and experimental work.

However Spring trees (March 1895) (Fig.3) Harmsen regards as a far more successful aquarelle in its sensitive handling of the “soft greys, delicate blues and gentle red-tinted sepia” without the fussy detail apparent in the others. Instead, she says there is a “tremulous calligraphy delineating slender trunks and wind-cradles branches and twigs” (Harmsen 1980, 11). This work is perhaps a softer, more delicate painting, with its misty horizon and a sense of melancholic sweetness than Bridge in a forest (1895) (Fig.2). It is interesting to note that Spring trees (1895) (Fig.3) was only regarded (by Bertha, according to Harmsen) as an “insignificant sketch”, mounted with white board, unlike the “over-worked” Bridge in a forest (1895) (Fig. 2) which had been given a heavy gilt frame. It was customary to frame watercolours in this way so that they might compete with the highly regarded oil paintings in exhibitions. Only watercolours that looked like oils were exhibited while watercolours were often kept in private portfolios (Harmsen 1980, 11).

According to Harmsen, Wild parsley (nd) (not illustrated) was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1900, but it is now lost. There are no records or further detail of this work so discussion of its merits or otherwise is curtailed. It is, however, an indication of her acceptance as a professional artist (Harmsen 1980, 15).

As previously mentioned, in 1896 Bertha probably studied at the Westminster School of Art under W. Mouat-Loudon (1860-?) but from 1897-1899 she definitely attended the St Ives School of Landscape Painting in Cornwall, under Julius Olsson (1864-1942) (Harmsen 1980, 12). Olsson had no formal training in art. He lived in St Ives between 1896 and 1915, where he developed his reputation in landscapes and often of stormy or moonlit seascapes, handled in an impressionist manner. He became a member of the St Ives Art Club, where he also gave



instruction. His style is similar to Seascape in moonlight (nd) (Fig. 137), by W. E Osborn, of which Bertha was known to be fond. Like Bertha, Olsson's small oil sketches are surprisingly impressionistic, whereas his larger works are more highly finished. The subject matter and treatment of the moonscapes is romantic. McConkey suggests that this conflict in style was visible in other artists during the Edwardian period in England (McConkey 1995, 168, 169).

Portraits and landscapes painted by the young Bertha at this time, such as Unfinished portrait of a lady (Fig. 4), Cornish girl (Fig. 7), Sketch of Edith King (Fig. 16), Cottages in Cornwall (Fig. 5) and Fishing boats, St Ives (Fig. 6), River scene (Fig. 8), (all undated) and Landscape with trees and cottages (1898) (Fig. 9) (Harmsen 1980, 10-13), show her competence and adherence to the prevalent decorous academic style of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, as well as an eagerness to experiment with technique within the allowed parameters. They have a nostalgic charm typical of the late Victorian period, an increasingly competent painting technique, excellent draughtsmanship, all of which is at times somewhat overshadowed by a sentimentality, a tendency towards literal illustration and desire for a highly finished (overworked) surface. Many have the dark *imprimatura* then favoured by academic painters, with a strong emphasis on tonal variation. However, some small landscapes from this period are described by Harmsen as "sombre and ponderous but with a sense of the dramatic," but contain the "largesse" which Maria Stein-Lessing identified as the most important characteristic of Bertha's mature style (Harmsen 1980, 13). These descriptions give credence to the influence of Olsson on her work.

This period in English painting has been described as a period of hibernation by the likes of George Moore, a critic, during which "adequate and attractive" work was produced but little of startling originality (Harmsen 1980, 14, 15). McConkey suggests that this period of painting in England was characterised by the struggle between the English preference for a highly finished academic style and the Impressionist desire to capture a fleeting moment in time. The influence of photography and the lack of narrative and symbol in French Impressionism caused contradictions in English painting at that time. English painting may have appeared Impressionistic but often it substituted the idyllic for the mundane in subject

matter, as seen in the work of John S Sargent (1856-1925) and Wilson Steer (1860-1942) (McConkey 1995, 46, 47). Roger Fry, whose opinion reflected the Post-Impressionist generation, was dismissive of the English Impressionists. He criticised Sargent's work as contrived and inauthentic. Fry criticised Sargent's painting as being a somewhat outdated imitation of Impressionism, saying:

...a new revelation of what colour could be and what painting might attempt, and how it could be at once decorative and realistic... what thrilled us all then was the fact that this picture was the first feeble echo which came across the channel of what Manet and his friends had been doing with a far different intensity for ten years or more (Fry 1926, in McConkey 1995, 44).

Victorian painting was expected to be serious, and display impeccable technique. Carefully considered composition and tasteful colour in the classical tradition of picture-making was demanded. These ideals were the vestiges of the once great surge in interest in landscape painting as an identified genre in the Constable, the Norwich School and, to a lesser degree, Turner tradition of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in England. The link between Turner and the Impressionists was accepted (McConkey 1995, 55). Turner was brought up in the tradition of the picturesque which implies that only certain outstanding combinations in nature are suitable material for art (Clarke 1969, 288). During Victorian and Edwardian times, Turner's eccentric style was admired but it is clear that few successfully emulated him. MacColl and Moore in 1892 hailed Hercules Brabazon Brabazon (1821- 1906) as Turner's successor. Brabazon, an artist originally from France whose loosely handled and atmospheric watercolours of picturesque scenes of Venice influenced Steer (1860-1942), Sargent (1856-1925) and Sickert (1860-1942) was regarded as an early precursor to Impressionism in England. Significant to this research is that Brabazon, like Bertha, showed a preference for depicting moonlight or twilight scenes. Unlike Brabazon, Bertha's early work in watercolours lacks the economy of means and relies heavily on naturalistic and detailed representation (McConkey 1995, 55, 103, 104).

Later Harmsen observes that as a mature woman, Bertha regarded Turner as one of the greatest landscape painters of all time, but no influence of his work is to be seen in these early pictures (Harmsen 1980, 15). This research suggests that Turner's influence may

indeed be seen in her work. Turner's representation of nature was as a threatening, sometimes menacing, always powerful force that manifests human frailty. Bertha's mature work, it is suggested, implies this in different ways. Unlike Turner, much of Bertha's work is quite heavily reliant on linear qualities, rather than atmospheric effects. Looking towards Swaziland (or Opal valley) (Fig. 70) is less emphatically linear than her early work. Many of Bertha's early paintings are imbued with gloomy Romanticism, which may reflect the fashion of her youth and the teaching of Ruskin, whom she admired. Neither the work of the Pre-Raphaelites nor the work of Whistler and Sargent appeared to influence her, and Sickert and Wilson Steer were too young in the 1890s to be widely known (Harmsen 1980, 15).

Herbert Read described this period in English landscape painting (1890-1900) as "that doldrum epoch" from which painters such as Whistler and Sickert tried to break away (Harmsen 1980, 14). Only a decade later were the first signs of aesthetic rebelliousness in England noted in pre-World War 1 London, with the advent of the Bloomsbury Group (Arnold 1987) and their loss of faith in formalism in the classic tradition. English landscape painting was given new impetus by the then controversial new French movement, the Impressionists (Arnold 1987).

At the turn of the century, Bertha's brooding landscapes began to make way for a lighter coloured, less formally composed Impressionist manner. An early example of this transitional period between an academic Romanticism and Impressionist experiment may be observed in Bertha's Sunflowers and nasturtiums (nd) (Fig. 10). This painting, though typical of the Victorian penchant for descriptiveness and the picturesque, is notably brighter and less formal both in subject and composition. Typically of Bertha, the horizon is high, the distant glimpse of landscape a misty grey blue, with the focus on the brightly coloured yellow sunflowers in the middle foreground.

Kentish poppyfield (nd) (Fig. 11) is regarded as a major work of this period. Bertha signed this work both as B. King and B. Everard, signifying that Bertha considered it "good enough to exhibit after her marriage" (Harmsen 1980, 15, 16). This painting is an uncomfortable blend of the "Ruskinian gloom" to which Harmsen refers, and a contrived Impressionist

technique. The subject is a carefully positioned group of quaint, pale haystacks beneath a curved horizon, contrasted by a group of dark trees. Harmsen suggests that in this work Bertha's complex, conflicting personality gives the painting a compelling tension, and that this quality is evident in all her major paintings (Harmsen 1980, 15). However, it is in this researcher's opinion a work of less stature than Harmsen suggests. Its contrived composition and bravura technique reveals the young Bertha's attempts to create a substantial work which would be an acceptable entrance into the art world in which she so desired to participate.

During this period Bertha painted several small sketches that Harmsen suggests appear uncontrived, are virtually without subject, and are merely records of visual experiences. The colours are light, the brushstrokes loose, the edges undefined allowing one area to merge into another, and are "involuntarily" exploiting "abstract design". The colours are reminiscent of a "Renoir or a Monet garden" (Harmsen 1980, 17).

These works include Dune landscape (Fig. 14), Farmyard (Fig. 13), Study of ducks (c1901) (Fig. 15). These small works have none of the contrived nature of Kentish poppyfields (nd) (Fig. 11). Their subject is not always immediately discernable. They are explorations of technique in a tentative manner that suggests Bertha's close and perhaps truer observation of the nature of the objects she has selected to paint. All three works are as if viewed from above, the horizon therefore almost insignificant. Despite this (Bertha's establishment of the horizon as an indicator of depth had been typical) there is a strong sense of space. Study of ducks (c1901) (Fig. 15) is an unsentimental recording of a group of ducks in the dappled shade cast across their backs, nestled on a faded pinkish-orange ground with blue-purple shadows. The writhing forms behind them suggest the linear pattern of plant stems or branches. This creates a striking contrast in the bold orange-yellow and olive green to the broad expanse of loosely applied paint in the foreground, effectively confusing the fore- and background in a visually pleasing interplay of design and colour.

Edith King picking flowers (1900) is what Harmsen regards as the culmination of Bertha's previous Impressionist experiments. It is somewhat larger and more "finished" despite its Impressionist leanings, but is significant in that it totally repudiates the "grand manner" of



the preceding epoch (Harmsen 1980, 18). This work, housed in the Tatham Art Gallery is undoubtedly an acknowledgement of Impressionism in its looser handling of impastoed paint and the generally lighter palette. However, the Victorian sentimentality of the frailty and insignificance of person-kind in the face of nature owes as much to Turner and Constable as it does to some Christian ideologies. Again Bertha has indicated a high horizon, the cliff top, where the blue sky adds a gentle foil to the pastel pinks of the cliff face. Edith's figure is almost lost among the daubs and scrapes, engaged in an elegant, decidedly feminine pastime, and one that reveals the pervasiveness of the Arcadian dream, where gendered activities were valorised in response to social norms or needs.

It is apparent that the Victorian concept of what was public and private was being revealed at this early stage of Bertha's painting career. What she considered to be her "major" works (i.e. for public exhibition) were often less spontaneous and perhaps more contrived. In effect, she was putting her best "public foot" forward. For example, Edith picking flowers (1900) (Fig.17) (one of the few which she had signed and dated, suggesting that it was for public display) (Fig.17) is perhaps a formalised version of the three sketches Dune landscape (nd) (Fig.14), Farmyard (nd) (Fig. 13) and Study of ducks (c. 1901) (Fig.15). Certainly the vigour with which she applied the paint and which came from greater confidence in technique and a greater sensitivity to the subtle variations in tone and colour must have been learned in the preceding works. However, Bertha's apparent insistence to produce work that would merit public approval seemed to thwart an ability to be unselfconscious. Edith picking flowers (1900) (Fig.17) was completed prior to her move to South Africa.

During her brief stay in Pretoria, Bertha completed several small sketches of the surrounding landscape, essentially recording her new surroundings. Examples of these would be Dirt road near Pretoria (1902) (Fig. 29) and Tented camp, Pretoria (1902) (Fig. 30). These sketches in oil were executed on small wood panels and depict a very different landscape from those to which she had been accustomed. According to Harmsen, they reveal a similarity to the work of Frans Oerder and Pieter Wenning in their unsentimental and accurate description of the Transvaal winter veld. Harmsen suggests that they are perhaps of greater value as a historical record than for any significant aesthetic appeal (Harmsen 1980,

20, 21). It may be argued that these unpretentious sketches reveal Bertha's sensitivity to light and space which are frequently overwhelmed by her need to create more technically finished works for public display. In these private works, Bertha has no need to render the picturesque or to impress the viewer with technical skill.

During this period Bertha adopted divergent styles. The first small painting she did of The Bonnefoi store, (25.12.1902) (Fig. 32) was completed before her marriage. It depicts the store building in the strong African light, viewed from the cool shade of the tall gum trees. It is a sketchily painted study of light and shade, the technique not dissimilar from her last works in England. There is a liveliness and confidence to her brush strokes, and a keen sense of composition which is used to good advantage to create a sense of depth and space. This, in turn, is denied by the flattening effect of bright light and overall equivalence of mark making. Despite what Harmsen refers to as Impressionistic technique and "boisterous colouring" that retains a sense of Ruskinian gloom and foreboding which she suggested was evident also in Kentish poppyfield (nd) (Fig. 11), (Harmsen 1980, 22), this painting may be interpreted as an inquisitive look at a hitherto unseen African light, which flattens forms and enhances some colours while bleaching others. The shadowed areas are densely and intensely painted with overlays of thinned paint. The light areas again make use of impasted paint and verge on a similar technical bravura in a somewhat clichéd response, as seen in Kentish poppyfield (nd) (Fig. 11).

Soon after her marriage, Bertha painted a large oil entitled Figure in a landscape (nd) (Fig. 33), which is remarkably more academic and conservative in technique and subject matter than any work Bertha had done thus far in South Africa. The brush marks are far more controlled even than in Edith picking flowers (1900) (Fig. 17), and the colour more subdued, which suggests a somewhat Romantic, melodramatic interpretation of the view. A small, semi-prostrate female figure with a head-cloth is dwarfed by the vastness of the uninhabited landscape, its loneliness and insignificance softened by the inclusion of a swathe of veld flowers in the immediate foreground. Harmsen suggests that this oil is an attempt by Bertha to "underscore her professionalism" but one in which her "adventurous personality is suppressed" (Harmsen 1980, 23). It could be argued that Bertha's identification with the



isolated figure in this landscape may be an expression of her own feelings at the time. Empathy with the figure suddenly reveals the magnitude of the (albeit Anglicised) landscape. However, this research suggests that this suppression of her inclination to expressionism, with its attendant apparently almost careless application of paint, proved to be a major stumbling block in Bertha's artistic career. The confidence of her sketches, with the areas of unresolved composition and muddying of paint, often retain a freshness and vitality, which the public works seem at pains to conceal.

Although this work could possibly pass for an English landscape with its harmonious treatment of colour and dramatic sky, the rocks in the foreground and indeed the woman (an African), suggest Bertha's ability to glean from the English academic tradition and apply this knowledge to her context. Harmsen suggests that Bertha's reliance on traditional concepts of conventional painting is perhaps indicative of her insecurity and eagerness to please her new family in this genteel rendition of a landscape (Harmsen 1980, 23). This suggestion proves to be indicative of Bertha's wishes to find acceptance of her public work, at times irrespective of the artistic intelligence and critical integrity of those whom she desired to please.

In 1909, shortly after the birth of Sebastian, Bertha painted one of her major, probably best-known works entitled Mid-Winter on the Komati, (c. 1910) and is also known as Where the serpentine Koomati [sic] flows a deep enamelled blue (Fig. 39). There has been some confusion about this work as in Harmsen's initial research it was incorrectly assumed to be Peace of Winter (1909) (Fig. 37). Subsequent research by Hilton Marlton in 1986 (Harmsen 2000, 7) has confirmed that the award winning painting was in fact Mid-Winter on the Komati (Fig.39). This painting received a gold medal for landscape painting at the arts and crafts exhibition in Johannesburg in 1910, arranged by Lady Florence Phillips (Harmsen 200, 7). The alternative romantic title Where the serpentine Koomati [sic] flows a deep enamelled blue, may have been given by either the artist or exhibitor, but suggests the underlying need to romanticise the subject. That this work was given such a prestigious award suggests that Bertha was capable of work that was sufficiently meticulous and technically proficient (i.e. academic) to receive attention at a time when Romantic realism was popular in South Africa. Unlike Mid-Winter on the Komati (c1910) (Fig. 39), Peace of Winter (1909) (Fig. 37) does

not contain figures. In typical Herkomer tradition, this large painting was painted on site, on the Clerqsvallei farm not far from Bonnefoi (Harmsen 1980, 28). It is a classically composed work, expressing with dignity, monumentality and some sense of nostalgia, the bleak highveld landscape. The technique is quite meticulous but confident; the colour naturalistic. There is none of the expressionist flamboyance of colour seen in her sketches. Small areas of loosely applied paint are carefully concealed in this highly finished work.

In what Harmsen describes as a “stately” landscape, Bertha’s ebullience is again restrained and it does suggest an undeniably Romantic, tranquil, somewhat melancholic mood. Harmsen again invites comparison to the works of Frans Oerder, to show that the artist herself is responsible for the controlling of the overall mood of the work. Harmsen suggests that the realism or naturalism in her technique is contrived as a result of her painting what she saw with personal aesthetic intervention (Harmsen 1980, 30). The accompanying photograph, taken some years later, suggests rather that there may have been very little intervention on Bertha’s part. This painting seems to have captured the imagination of the South African art public, as it is both monumental, nostalgic in its wide-open spaces, and suggests the untouched and rugged beauty of the veld. Previously these types of harsh South African landscapes were not often considered worthy of interpretation. Curiously, it hovers between the Dutch sense of realism in its ordinariness and English Romanticism in its grandeur and nostalgia. Preference was given in landscape painting to the impressionist Cape scenes of gabled homes in dappled sunlight. Bertha’s ability to dramatise and aggrandise a fairly ordinary landscape is evident. Credit must be given for her bold choice of subject and scale, if not for much innovation in terms of technique or colour.

Bertha painted The krantz (nd) (Fig. 42) around this time. This painting was exhibited on the arts and crafts show in Johannesburg in 1910, as well as at the National Society of Artists in 1916 along with A country store (nd) (Fig. 31) and Peace of Winter (c.1909) (Fig.37), (or possibly Mid- Winter on the Komati) (Harmsen 1980, 45). The krantz (nd) (Fig. 42), though somewhat smaller, is considerably more impressionistic and colourful than Mid-Winter on the Komati, although it is equally naturalistic in appearance. The vertical format and the looser application of paint creates a much less grandiose work, similar to some of her

smaller, perhaps more “domestic” works executed at that time, such as A street in Carolina (nd) (Fig.43). This small sketch depicts a house (or “shanty”) dwarfed by a group of trees, the moonlight casting long shadows across a dirt road. Again, one is aware of Bertha’s sense of nature’s omnipotence. The brushwork is loose and expressive.

Another painting she completed during this time was Asbestos hills (c.1910) (Fig. 44), painted near Badplaas. It was shown on the Royal Academy the following year when Bertha and the children toured England. Harmsen suggests that it is similar to Peace of Winter (1909) (Fig.37), as it has the same “emotional intensity” and “grandiose vision” (Harmsen 1980, 35). The painting Asbestos hills (Fig. 44) again relies on a high vantage point, with a breath-taking, swooping vista down the mountainside. The foreground is dark, while the distant hills fade towards the horizon. The focal point is low in the foreground, where the mountainsides seem to exert pressure on each other. This unusually situated focal point and large scale of the work does seem to suggest a sense of suppressed power and a vertiginous pull towards it.

Bertha’s more domestic The willows (1916) (Fig. 50), The Bonnefoi herd of angora goats (1917) (Fig.59) and Bonnefoi picnic (nd) (Fig. 45) recall some of her previous delight in design and experimental technique, which the larger, more frequently exhibited “official” works seem to lack. There is a sense of personal involvement at the expense of technical expertise, which, it is suggested, relies less on a finished product and is less affected by external influences that so hampered her self-expression.

The large oil paintings seemed to sap all Bertha’s physical and emotional energy, and after completion she was often ill. However, smaller sketches of the farmstead and the children at play did not seem to affect her adversely. It is suggested that Bertha’s large public paintings were produced with an audience in mind. That she felt she could not meet all artistic expectations required, and her determination to succeed, may have been partly responsible for this phenomenon of repeated illness. This is not to say that none of her major works was successful, but rather that her very real desire to express what she saw was hampered by social expectations and an inherent self-consciousness. The smaller sketches,

of which there were many, appear to have been done at leisure or during moments “stolen” between the demands of running a household, farming and missionary commitments. Many of these “less worthy” paintings are still in the possession of the family, considered unsuitable for sale or less prestigious by comparison to such “monoliths” as Mid-Winter on the Komati (c1910) (Fig. 39). Examples from this period would include View of gum trees from Bonnefoi (c 1902) (Fig.64) and Cypresses at night, Bonnefoi (c 1916) (not illustrated).

Bertha’s painting was also a sporadic occurrence because of her need for total immersion and commitment to producing a large oil painting (Harmsen 1980, 39). Her letters indirectly betray the fact that she dreaded the total commitment which painting demanded of her (Harmsen 1980, 39). Charles also learned to dread her expeditions, as she would inevitably be physically ill and emotionally drained after the completion of a painting (TAG undated letter no 51).

In order to make time to paint, away from the demands of the Bonnefoi store, household, and accompanying demands on her time, Bertha would take the whole family along to Lekkerdraai where they would spend the winter months. Bertha would explore the area surrounding Lekkerdraai on horseback, select a site, and return later with servants to carry and erect a temporary shelter from where she could paint. Frequently these sites were in remote areas, precariously situated on mountain slopes. Irrespective of the weather, Bertha would persevere until her painting was virtually complete (Harmsen 1980, 41).

This fondness for immersion in the landscape, nature and the romance of this removal of herself from the constraints of culture surely stems from the lessons learned at Herkomer’s school in Bushey in her youth. This was a double-edged sword, as her health invariably suffered from exposure to the elements, but this ability to work from life under trying conditions was also responsible for the most significant work of her oeuvre. Not only did she learn more about the physical landscape, but also grew increasingly aware of her own position in it. While she shied away from public appearances, she felt drawn to the isolated vistas of this territory. Increasingly, the similarity between her self and the landscape became apparent. It is interesting to note that in a letter to Edith while at Lekkerdraai, Bertha

confessed that while she yearned for the solitude of the mountains, she felt her loneliness more intensely there, and could not endure too much of it without seeking the companionship of her family or by writing her cathartic letters to her sister (TAG undated letter no 182).

Of the Lekkerdraai paintings, one of the earliest was Moonrise, painted around 1910 or 1911 (Fig.46). It depicts a landscape viewed from a high vantage point, bathed in moonlight with a pale sliver of river snaking its way through a wide valley towards the distant Swaziland peaks. Moonrise is an evocative painting, despite its conventional handling of composition and technique. Its strength lies in its almost monotonous view and the sense of deep space. The subject itself becomes a less formidable presence in the subtleties of colour and tonal range. The picturesque has become subservient to the ordinary. The foreground is somewhat over-emphasised by the application of textured paint but the shadowed areas seem to glow with suppressed colour. This may be as a result of Bertha's method of applying thin washes of colour as an undercoat, thereafter building up the areas with ever increasingly thick paint. The dark areas therefore remain fresher and less "worked", the fluidity of her brushmarks still visible.

Pale hillside (nd) (Fig. 47) is another work from this period\*. Although both paintings are similar in scale, the viewer's interpretation of landscape may be quite different. The viewpoint is much lower, which reduces the feeling of majesty and awe. The horizon, although typically high, is less obvious as it is broken by the treetops and is much paler than the foreground. Curiously, the middle ground, behind the trees, is uncomfortably "absent". The sky is also painted in a swirling, somewhat contrived manner that reads as a flattened panel. On closer inspection, one can see a flock of goats and a herd boy, which alters the mood from one of an expanse of uninhabited landscape (as in Moonrise) (Fig.46) to one that is more intimate and somewhat illustrative of the romantic idyll. Harmsen (1980, 40) considers that in this work Bertha expresses a sense of contentment, that it is on a more human scale and therefore not as imposing as Moonrise (Fig. 46). This research suggests that Bertha's penchant for including narrative detail in her work often detracts from expressing the expansiveness of space in these South African landscapes.

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\* As many of Bertha's works are undated, this research relies largely on Harmsen's approximate dates.



Many of the smaller Bonnefoi and Lekkerdraai paintings present the landscapes by the light of the moon or at dusk or dawn. There are reasons for this other than her preference for the mysterious or dramatic. Bertha lacked the time during the day to indulge in painting (Harmsen 1980, 40). She had elected to teach her children at home with the occasional help of a governess. She also had a large household and farm to manage as well as the task of missionary work, which took up much of her time, and patience, during the day. Bertha also, however, owned a large oil painting by W. E. Osborne called Seascape in moonlight (nd) (Fig.137). According to Everard Haden, it was a favourite of hers (pers com LEH 2001). Its origins and further details are not known. It is similar to work by Olsson, and it may be speculated that either Olsson or a student of his had given it to her. It is difficult to judge the quality of painting from the photograph made available to this research by the Everard family.

Another example of her interest in moonlight would be Morning tree (1916) (Fig.51), and is what Bertha refers to as “more or less a portrait of a tree” (Harmsen 1980, 42-43), which appears to focus on the strangely evocative shadows cast by the early morning moon. The depiction of a cluster of straggly, rather Pierneef-esque trees (cypresses, according to Harmsen), seem to have an anthropomorphic quality, which is affirmed by Bertha’s description of them. They appear to have been painted while she was suffering “considerable” pain in her leg (Harmsen 1980, 42). The paint is thickly and freely applied, and appears quite sombre in tone. It is strangely reminiscent of her later Delville Wood series (1926) (Figs.103-110) in its anthropomorphic and expressive qualities.

By the banks of the Komati (Fig.53) and Spring, eastern Transvaal, (probably dating between 1916 and 1918) (Fig.54) show Bertha’s experiment again with an Impressionist style, which Harmsen suggests is akin to that of Pissarro and Sisley (Harmsen 1980, 46). Here Bertha explores again the effects of cast shadow. This time she gives emphasis to a mauve shadow pattern, which was expressly included, according to Harmsen, as a decorative device and therefore is not focused on imitation or overt naturalism. Harmsen refers to this style as “Impressionist Realism” and that the strength of the painting lies in the “cerebral

manipulation of line and colour” (Harmsen 1980, 47). This quotation perhaps calls attention to Bertha’s propensity for selection of landscape elements for the purpose of creating a pleasing composition, perhaps at the expense of its vitality. Harmsen unearthed a photograph of the view for By the banks of the Komati (c.1918/18). This photograph (Fig.52) shows that Bertha had removed and over-painted figures of Bury and the children, probably as suggested by Edith. As the present whereabouts of this work is not known, accurate analysis is not possible to ascertain whether or not the work was improved by the figures’ removal. What does become apparent, though, is perhaps a greater sense of unity and depth in the composition by the erasure of the obviously narrative figurative detail. The paint application is perhaps derivative of Pissarro to some extent, but overall there is far more emphasis on naturalistic and descriptive detail to warrant any stronger relationship to Pissarro. Harmsen mentions the non-descriptive colour which Bertha employed in the “contrived mauve shadow pattern in the foreground”, which Harmsen suggests removes any niggling doubts that might arise that Bertha might have used the photograph too closely. Harmsen asserts that Bertha queried the importance of imitation but concedes that Bertha felt “a certain amount was good” (Harmsen1980, 46, 47). Bertha’s decorative sense is overwhelmingly evident in the decorative, picturesque depiction of this somewhat timid landscape.

Similarity to either Camille (1830-1903) or Lucien (1863-1944) Pissarro’s work is marginal. Bertha, like the Impressionists, does not appear to have used black in shadow areas during this period. The Impressionists used complementary colours, as suggested by the newly discovered colour theories. According to McConkey (1995), by the late 1880s Camille and Lucien Pissarro came under the influence of the Post-Impressionists. Camille experimented with pointillism for a while, but abandoned it after 1890. The main features of Camille’s mode of perception are a centralised composition, typically a view looking down a roadway, with figures in the middle distance. Lucien also experimented with neo-Impressionist colour divisionism, typically using juxtaposed strong colour contrasts. He became a member of the New English Art Club in 1906 and befriended Sickert and Gore (McConkey 1995, 177-181). The Impressionist application of colour alternated between daubs of pure colour to the later Neo-Impressionist dots that gave the work a sketchy or unfinished appearance that so offended the academicians. The tonality was usually light as a result of their painting on a

white ground. Many English painters were influenced by the Impressionist style, but like Wynford Dewhurst (1864-1941), very few were able to rid themselves of picturesque subject matter although they adopted the looser manner of applying paint. In Dewhurst's work, one can see his indebtedness to Monet's colour (McConkey 1995, 119, 120). His preference for a more evenly toned palette and the prevalence of violet or mauve-tinged shadow areas gives the composition a sweetness that is not evident in Monet's work, although similar colours are used. The various hues of violet are balanced in both Monet and Pissarro's work by an absence of sentimentality.

Bertha's work from this period seems to have had more in common with English than with French Impressionism. The English romantic tendency, inherited from such painters as Turner and the members of the New English Art Club, was retained in her work. This desire to sweeten or dramatise was pervasive in Bertha's work; often the latter appeared to have been a characteristic of her personality. In a letter to Ruth, Bertha described her experience at having seen a waterfall on a nearby farm, and implored her to paint it. She used powerful adjectives such as "hurtling torrent", "quite wonderful", "raging thundering theatrical sky", "enormous clouds" and "violent thunderstorm" (TAG undated letter no 172, after 1926). In her most successful work this romantic tendency has been an attribute, as it seemed to have influenced her ability to express her wonder at the vastness of the South African landscape and the force of nature.

Similarly, Spring, eastern Transvaal (nd) (Fig.54) is reminiscent of Moonrise (c 1910/11) (Fig.46) and Asbestos hills (c 1910) (Fig. 44) in composition. The decorative qualities are evident in both the choice of colour and harmonious composition. Again, Bertha felt compelled to include a human presence (herd-boy), quite centrally positioned. She was apparently conscious of Edith's critical stance about her penchant for reducing the landscape into the picturesque by such inclusions, and had been known to over-paint previous such elements at Edith's suggestion (Harmsen 1980, 46, 47).

Another painting in this moon and shadow series, and perhaps one of the most evocative of the series, is Wag'n bietjies (nd), also called The three witches (Fig.57), which like Spring,

eastern Transvaal (nd) (Fig.54) is at first glance a conventional landscape. The most interesting feature of this work is the cast shadows of the three trees. Harmsen describes it as:

This grotesque sombre purple pattern - all the more intriguing because it is virtually a mirror image of the prominent cloud shape above - fills the entire foreground, and is far more important as a formal element in the composition than the "three witches" themselves (Harmsen 1980, 49).

Once again, a pale sky is relegated to a narrow strip above the distant horizon. The dark, densely painted landscape is dramatic in its writhing contrasts between dark and light lacework of form and shadow. The predominant colours are again the purplish hues she reserves for shadowed areas, while the lighter areas are plastered with impasto paint. Emphasis is strongly focused on design rather than naturalistic representation.

Harmsen (1980, 49) suggests that this painting led to Bertha's working on a series of small canvases collectively known as "Moon and Shadow". In these it is apparent that she exploited the design and subtle tone values of the shadow of a single tree cast on bleached grass, where the tree itself is out of the picture. This diminished importance on the traditional concept of subject matter is perhaps reminiscent of Bertha's last works, completed in England before she emigrated to South Africa, and one wonders at the reason for the hiatus before returning to this less conventional approach. Harmsen argues that Bertha's preference for romanticism of the subject may be attributed to what she regards as her

...Romantic Victorian heritage as well as her conviction that the subject was not to be ignored, demanded these pale moon-filled skies, but aesthetically the artist was clearly more interested in the formal elements that could, ultimately, lead to pure abstraction (Harmsen 1980, 49).

Furthermore, Harmsen explains that Bertha did not pursue the possibilities of pure abstraction, as she preferred to have the anchorage of a recognisable subject matter. However, in her later work she did "distort the design and use intensified colour to give her pictures a more forceful and monumental impact" (Harmsen 1980, 49). It becomes apparent that Harmsen sought, somewhat in vain, for evidence of Bertha's move towards pure



abstraction. Bertha does seem to have toyed with the idea, but did not pursue that route. Her attempts were contrived and lacklustre, as seen in Winter grass, Transvaal (nd) (Fig.55) and Banks of the Komati (rotunda, nd.) (Fig.56).

In the Skurweberg paintings, Bertha first experimented with a palette knife as a new technique. The Skurweberg paintings, as this series may conveniently be called, are very different in colour, tone and technique from her earlier Lekkerdraai paintings. In the latter, bluish-pinks, warm yellows and dark purplish reds or umbers, deep blue, dark green and yellow-ochre, applied in regular dabs, seem to predominate, while the Skurweberg paintings consist predominantly of dull grey-green. Dramatic clouds add a certain tension and drama to the work.

Of this series, Baboon valley (nd) (Fig.67) is probably aesthetically most pleasing. In this work, her use of the palette knife shows a confident hand and the subject's rugged nature lends itself to this technique. The colours are thick and oily. The vertical format enhances the feeling of compression at the edges of the mountainsides in the centre of the painting. A sense of restrained energy is apparent. The overall dark tonality enhances a sense of foreboding.

A certain gaucheness in the technique of handling the palette knife may be noticed in examples such as Twantwani (Fig.60), Charlie's rocks, Skurweberg (Fig.61) and Green hills (Fig.66). Whereas in Baboon valley (Fig.67) (so named because it was regularly visited by a troop of chacma baboons) probably painted around 1916-17, Bertha's confidence and sensitivity is evident in what can all too easily become a contrived technique. The sculptural aspect of the impastoed medium and almost carved technique, along with a new-found confidence in the expressive use of emotive colour gives this painting a new depth of feeling and meaning without the academic decorum evident in many of her previous large oils.

That Bertha struggled with her painting is evidenced in her frequent letters to her sister Edith. In her anguished appeals to her sister for assistance and constructive criticism of her work, she expresses the frustration of her inability to paint the subtleties of the landscape. Bertha



wrote:

My picture doesn't look too bad hanging in the hall but it is very unlike my work. Much more faint and timid. I did not after all alter the scheme so it is much more your picture than mine. You never answered my important question about the smoke that I want to put in the distance (TAG letter no 29 dated 1917).

In a letter dated February 1917, Bertha is probably referring to Land of Luthany (circa 1917?) (Fig.68) that was probably painted before Baboon valley (Fig.67), according to Harmsen, in which signs of her struggle are evident. Probably one of her most ambitious landscapes of this series, she persevered until it was completed. Harmsen described the finished work as being "somewhat drab and unresolved" (Harmsen 1980, 54).

This research would argue that the narrow horizontal format with the dark foreground receding into a pale distant horizon has an energy and vitality that seems to rely on the sharply defined edges of the landmass in the foreground. There is a remarkable sense of space and depth and a variety of well-placed tonal areas that entice visual exploration from high contrast in the foreground into a hazy background along the sliver of reflective water of a meandering river in the valley. A sense of mystery, uncluttered by a surfeit of detailed visual information and a sense of the vastness of the landscape brings to mind Bertha's reference to man's insignificance in the face of nature (TAG undated letter no 182) and also to her perception of God as being a source of light (TAG undated letter no 64). This painting certainly seems to capture and convey aspects of Bertha's perception of her faith, her smallness and her vulnerability.

While in Bloemfontein, Bertha painted The twin towered church, Bloemfontein seen from Monument Road (1919) (Fig. 69), which has subsequently been bought by the Bloemfontein City Council. This particular work is fairly small, probably painted after Baboon valley (c1917) (Fig.67) (Harmsen 1980, 70) and is evidence of Bertha's move towards an increasingly subtle tonal range, and a loose, expressive application of paint, with less stress placed on the actual subject matter. In this case, the twin towers seem to merge into the background. A greater similarity to the work of Lucien Pissarro is evident here in the evocation of form rather than its description.

One of Bertha's most remarkable and technically proficient examples of the Skurweberg series was completed shortly before she left for England with her children in 1920, and is, according to Harmsen, the last work Bertha painted before her stay in Europe. It is alternatively titled Opal valley or View towards Swaziland or Looking towards Swaziland (c.1920/21) (Fig.70) (Harmsen 1980, 57, 58).

Unlike the other more sombre paintings of this series, it has a luminescence that derives from her totally unrealistic colour. Despite this, the landscape appears naturalistic at first glance but the colours of nature have been intensified beyond naturalism and their juxtaposition intensifies and adds to the turbulence of the composition. The paint is applied with a vigour that is almost violent. This suggests a greater expressive and technical confidence perhaps gained in the paintings where she used a palette knife instead of a brush. Once again, the viewpoint of the vast landscape is taken from the precipitously high vantage point of a rocky outcrop overlooking the wide valley. A small orange road is engulfed by the acid greens and warm, sullied blues of the landscape, while the languid river shimmers in the distance, snaking its way towards the distant peaks.

In May 1916 Bertha exhibited twenty-two paintings at Eunice School, Bloemfontein, where they were shown in aid of war funds. These paintings remained in Eunice School for some time - between May 1916 and October 1917 (Harmsen 1980, 45, 66, 67). Included in the earlier exhibition were Poppyfield, (perhaps Kentish poppyfield, (nd) (Fig.11), Veld fire (nd) (not illustrated), Spring (nd) (possibly Fig. 54), and Winter in the Lowveld (nd) (Fig.49), the latter sold to the National Museum in Bloemfontein (Harmsen 1980, 68). The 1917 exhibition probably consisted of unsold works shown previously in Durban in July of that same year (Harmsen 1980, 68).

Although Bertha did not paint again until she reached Europe, she submitted some of her work to the South African Artists' Society that was open from 30<sup>th</sup> January to 19<sup>th</sup> February, 1922. She showed the large tondo Banks of the Komati (nd) (Fig.56), Opal valley (c1920/21), Winter grass, Transvaal (nd) (Fig.55) and Evening voluntary (nd) (not

illustrated). She also sent Baboon valley (nd) (Fig.67) and another unidentified work, but neither of these was hung. According to Harmsen, Evening voluntary fits the description of a fairly large painting of the Komati River on Lekkerdraai at sunset. It is a sombre, dark-brown landscape “illuminated by a gleam of water reflecting the last crescendo glow of a triumphant day” (Harmsen 1980, 75). The painting is composed of a rather sedate stretch of land, with the ubiquitous flash of river that reflects a pale sky. The horizontal format and the meandering river suggest quietness, and perhaps even lethargy, which is echoed in the treatment of brush marks in the sky and the repetitive marks of the grassland. Bertha, distressed by the criticism of her work, the poor hanging of those that were accepted, and the rejection of two, refused to attend the opening (Harmsen 1980, 76).

Bertha’s despair gave way to depression, caused in part by her perception of what she thought would be a more enlightened society in Cape Town that would accept her work. Roworth and Crosland Robinson preferred academic paintings and resisted modernism in any form. Others such as Stern, Kottler, Zerffi, Spilhaus, Prowse and du Plessis were already adopting a less academic style. Bertha does not appear to have met them, and there is no evidence of her knowing their work. While in Cape Town Bertha was depressed. Bury remarked in a letter to Edith that Bertha was “too depressed to look at pictures” while in Johannesburg, so perhaps this may account for her ignorance or lack of desire to see other local artists’ work (TAG undated letter no 138). Although Bertha met Boonzaaier whose position in the establishment of the New Group in 1938 is well known, she was not admitted to this cultural circle, for reasons that are not clear. Bertha’s criticism of the work she saw in Cape Town was harsh. She had very decided opinions and was not afraid to express them. By this stage Bertha’s work bore little resemblance to the British academicism so popular at the turn of the century. It was, however, indebted to the romantic naturalism that was still popular in England at that time.

At Kimpton Hoek in England, Bertha began paying attention to her own painting again. In January 1924, she sent two pictures to the Salon in Paris, namely Opal valley (catalogued as View towards Swaziland, (Fig. 70) as it had been on the 1923 Royal Academy exhibition in London), and the Libertas tondo also known as Winter grass, Transvaal (nd)(Fig.55). The

latter was rejected but the former accepted (Harmsen 1980, 88).

In January of 1924, Bertha resumed painting, encouraged as usual by Edith (Harmsen 1980, 88). She had painted a small canvas of Leighton House (c1923/4) (Fig. 71) in which the regularity of the building structure and the clear organisation of the picture planes seem to have interested her. The cast shadows and contrasting tonal values suggest again a strange mood of foreboding. It appears very much like some of Pieter de Hooch's genre paintings of the 17th century, in the regularity of the composition, but the application of paint is thick and the process clearly visible. The result is that the surface of the work is apparent and little depth is suggested.

Another one of Bertha's moonlit scenes is Rubber factory, Harpenden (nd) (Fig. 72). According to Harmsen, this painting was made from a sketch on site and completed at home (Harmsen 1980, 88). Again, the symmetry of the composition is remarkable, with the tall, centrally-placed tower almost dividing the picture plane in two vertically. The overall geometry of the shapes, flattened as they are by equally thick distribution of paint, is contrasted by the evocative mood in a de Chirico-esque manner suggested by the looming cast shadow in the foreground and the unworldly colour. Bertha's ability to create a sense of foreboding and perhaps the Ruskinian gloom that prevailed in some of her earlier works contrasts with the apparently mundane subject matter. It is an enigmatic painting that is vaguely reminiscent of some of the work of Paul Nash, a painter whose work Bertha Everard knew and admired (Harmsen 1980, 89). This similarity to Nash is suggested by the somewhat broader expanses of paint than she has used before and simplified forms, but Bertha's work is much more compact in composition and far more reliant on somewhat saturated and harsh colour. Nash appears to have used less emphatic colour and less agitated paint application.

Bertha's other painting of this early period in England, such as Cornfields, Kimpton (1924) (Fig. 73) and Rubber factory, Harpenden (c 1924) (Fig. 72) are examples of two quite different painting styles as modes of expression. One mode appears to be very structured such as that seen in Haycover (c.1924) (Fig. 75) and Rubber factory, Harpenden (c.1924) (Fig. 72) and is concerned with creating a sense of clearly defined if flattened space. The other appears to be



more involved in broad applications of paint on a loaded brush that denies naturalistic spatial relationships and colour as in Cornfields, Kimpton (c.1924) (Fig.73) and Kimpton signpost (nd) (Fig.74). Harmsen points out that some of these works were painted alongside her daughter Ruth, who had had the benefit of studying art in Paris (Harmsen 1980, 94). This tendency to absorb a stylistic manner is seen again later when the two women painted together in South Africa. Bertha must have admired Ruth's ability, and experimented with this different way of applying paint directly with a new emphasis on line, colour and design in lieu of naturalism.

(Kimpton) Signpost (c1924) (Fig.74) and Haycover (nd) (Fig.75) are two examples from this period that suggest the influence of Paul Nash. Harmsen says that Bertha probably saw the work of Nash at the Leicester Galleries in June 1924, an influence that Bertha acknowledged to be present in her Hertfordshire paintings (Harmsen 1980, 126). Harmsen also remarks on their similarity to the work of the Bloomsbury Group painters such as Duncan Grant, Vanessa Bell and Roger Fry. Although there is no evidence to suggest that Bertha ever saw the work of these artists, Harmsen suggests that she did because while she was in South Africa, she was an avid reader of Fry and Bell's articles in art publications (Harmsen 1980, 95 to 96).

Furthermore, Harmsen suggests that Bertha's initial reluctance to paint was probably due to her feelings of intimidation at her initial encountering of modern painting at first hand, whereas previously she had only seen them as reproductions (Harmsen 1980, 96). Harmsen suggests that Bertha's initial cautious exercises may perhaps be seen as a transitional phase between an academic type of Impressionism and an embracement of a more vigorously expressive and modernist style which asserted itself the following year, in her paintings of Delville Wood in France (Figs.103-110) (Harmsen 1980, 96). However, this research proposes that her work in South Africa at Lekkerdraai for example Twantwani (nd) (Fig.60), Rock and thunderclouds, Skurweberg (nd) (Fig. 65), Baboon valley (nd) (Fig.67), Green hills (nd) (Fig.66) and to a lesser extent, and Opal valley (c.1920/21) (Fig. 70) were already showing signs of a clearer personal expressionist style than the earlier Romantic Impressionist style.



During 1925 in France, Bertha painted about six smallish works that may be referred to as the Chantilly Woods series. Among these are four small sketches called Chantilly Woods (Figs. 82, 84), Dancing tree (Fig. 83) and Spring woods (not illustrated) (all c.1925).

These small panels show a remarkably unrestrained technique when compared to Rubber factory, Harpenden (c.1924) (Fig.72). Interestingly, the subject is unremarkable. There are no majestic spaces, nor powerful subterranean forces implied. The trees, while still recognisable, appear to adopt an anthropomorphic quality. There is a strong emphasis on line, and the effects of juxtaposition of contrasting colour. The colours are non-descriptive, and are predominantly earth pink, cobalt blue and white. The paint is applied not only with the brush, but also with a palette knife and appears to have been applied with the blunt end of a paintbrush. This suggests an unselfconscious response to the subject with a spontaneous interpretation of colour and line, and is evidence of a bolder application of paint and greater indifference to academic style which may have been an influence of the Fauves, especially Matisse or Vlaminck.

As Harmsen notes, it is difficult to decide in what order these works were executed as none of them are dated and it is not possible to know whether Bertha began the series tentatively, and progressed through to the more “bravura statements” and freer brushwork of Dancing tree (1925) (Fig.83), the largest painting of this series, or vice versa (Harmsen 1980, 109). However, she does point out that Bertha regarded Impressionism as “old” and that she felt herself to be in a “stage between” old and new art. What is evident, though, is Bertha’s desire to experiment and explore other means of expression, while determined to be alone to paint in her own way.

Bertha painted at least five paintings in Bruneval, France, namely, The funny old castellated house at Bruneval (Fig.85), Road to the sea (Fig.86) and Cliff at Bruneval (Figs.87, 88, 89) (all c.1925), as well as Road to Bruneval (c 1925) (Fig. 90). This series of Bruneval paintings are all executed in strong, non-descriptive, strident colours that are much more overpowering than those used in Opal valley (1920) (Fig.70), with an apparent disregard for naturalism. Bertha’s use of colour is decidedly Fauvist in both hue and application. No

longer are they merely decorative, nor picturesque. Instead, their chromatic violence is disturbing. It appears that Bertha had relinquished her need for a subjective, but naturalistic interpretation of nature. Instead, the sense is that she has allowed herself to be completely overwhelmed by the intensity of experience, at the expense of the rationality to which she had clung for so long.

In a somewhat more restrained mood, Bertha painted Wheatfields, Normandy (Fig. 91) and Ploughed land, Normandy (Fig. 92) (both c. 1925). If these are compared to the Kimpton landscapes, their much bolder, more spontaneous handling is evident. In terms of subject matter, these paintings seem to be an interesting diversion from Bertha's usual compositions. The earth appears to arch upwards so that the horizon (which is free of the ubiquitous mountain ranges) compresses the sky into a tight arc. Despite the contrasting cooler blues of the sky and warm, flesh-coloured earth, the composition is a tightly-knit and integrated whole. Tonally, the colours are more closely ranged than in the Kimpton paintings. Although they are clearly fragments of a broad landscape, their emphasis on detailed or narrative description does not predominate. Colour, although recognisably naturalistic, is invigorated by the contrasting colour of the under-painting where surface paint has been scraped away. These works are surprisingly reminiscent of Bertha's early English sketches such as Farmyard (Fig. 13) or Study of ducks (Fig. 15) made some twenty-five years previously.

Harmsen suggests that they are "tokens of unequivocal homage to the late van Gogh" (Harmsen 1980, 113). Some similarity to van Gogh's (or perhaps Vlaminck's) impetuous, frenzied application of paint may be discernable, but the works lack the intensively broken or fractured brush marks characteristic of van Gogh's mature work. These paintings, now owned by the Tatham Art Gallery in Pietermaritzburg, caused a furore in 1967. The curator, Valerie Leigh, suggested to the local conservative city council that a selection of the Everard Group work be acquired that had previously been exhibited by the Pretoria Art Museum. After heated debate Leigh was eventually successful and was allowed, under protest, to acquire some of the works she had selected (Harmsen 1980, 113, 207).

Harmsen suggests that Paysage (Fig. 93) was painted after this experiment with Fauvism, and

is indicative of Bertha's new confidence and control of the medium and technique, describing this work as more forceful than the Hertfordshire paintings, more confidently abstract, with a "sophisticated yet emancipated brushwork" (Harmsen 1980, 113). This research argues that while Bertha has greater control of the flamboyant brushwork that threatened to overwhelm in the Bruneval series and that the composition is regulated and the forms simplified, there is little to suggest that she was pursuing abstraction. Rather, the economic use of simplified shapes and areas of tone suggest a greater interest in the evocative relationship between light and dark forms.

Both Bertha and Ruth painted this identical view, which makes for interesting comparison. It is difficult to differentiate Ruth's mature work from Bertha's, and this painting has previously erroneously been attributed to Ruth (Harmsen 1980, 114). However similar they appear, it is interesting to note Bertha's preference for a more decisively vertical format and the greater sense of foreboding inherent in her work. While Ruth's work has a broader format (although still vertical) and suggests a gentler, less awesome mood, both have a feeling of anticipation, suggested by the winding road that disappears around a bend. Ruth's is far more suggestive of a conventional sense of depth. However, there is a similarity in their preference for careful composition, simplified forms and limited colour. This similarity of style is what was later recognised as typical of the Everard Group.

Harmsen also notes that after each "wild stylistic and technical adventure Bertha Everard would revert to a more conservative, but also rejuvenated manner of painting" (Harmsen 1980, 114). This is presuming that the order in which the paintings are documented is correct. Whichever it was, it may be interesting to make associations between her life and work at this point. Frequently after criticism of her work, Bertha would retreat into a more acceptably staid manner of painting. Perhaps this reversal into a more formal language became a self-imposed discipline that she felt compelled to follow. It is remarkably absent in the Delville Wood series (Figs. 103-110), where Bertha gave free reign to her overtly emotional responses, and as a result, painted some of her most remarkable work.

Delville Wood was the site of a disastrous battle between the South African Infantry Brigade

and the invading German army on the 15<sup>th</sup> of July, 1916. The South Africans were literally slaughtered and of the 121 officers and 3032 men, only 2 officers and 751 men survived. The landscape was devastated and had been left as a grim reminder of the conflict. Ten years later, when the three women arrived, the landscape distressed the youthful Ruth, and she returned to Paris. Edith and Bertha found accommodation at Longueval, a village nearby that had been totally destroyed during the war (Harmsen 1980, 121).

The rebuilt village with its sturdy pink houses was virtually new, and resembled a Karoo village, a wind-pump at its centre and long rows of telephone poles leading to and from the village. There are two paintings of this village by Bertha, namely Longueval1 (Fig.94) and Road to Flair (Fig.96) (Harmsen 1980, 121 and 122). According to Harmsen, Bertha painted several versions of the Longueval road and its telegraph poles (Figs. 94, 95 and also Figs. 97, 98, 99) (Harmsen 1980, 122). These paintings are characterised by a similar viewpoint and the use of bold shapes, strong line and non-descriptive but emotive colours that appear to have been quite freely applied with a palette knife. These paintings were considered to be “unacceptably modern and positively ugly” by critics in South Africa in 1927 (Harmsen 1980, 122).

Edith recorded her sorrow at the spectacle of the ruined Delville Wood in a number of poems which, when compared to Bertha’s paintings of the same, reveal the different aspects of their perception. The following poem by Edith is an example of her work:

Three times has Delville Wood been cleared  
Of bramble and young thorn,  
In the ten years since these deep wounds  
In piteous Earth were torn.

The bloody slopes are covered now,  
Flowers greet you as you pass,  
But the heart hears a groaning sigh  
Beneath the heaving grass.

And still the ground is strewn about  
With bandolier and blade,  
Pathetic household pots and pans,  
Live shell and hand grenade.

And as they plant the stripling oaks  
In shell-pit and on mound.  
White bones gleam out, poor skulls and feet,  
From the warm-coloured ground.

Nay, Peace! ye see but winter grain  
Cold iron, riven sod;  
At Harvest every dying seed  
Yields quickening fruit of God.

(Harmsen 1980, 121).

While some of Edith's poems speak eloquently of the events with a pervasive feeling of sorrow and empathy, Bertha's paintings seem to express a far less conciliatory sentiment.

The barrenness and desolation of this wound inflicted on the landscape, she seems at times to have taken as a personal injury. Others express a variety of emotions ranging from tacit acceptance as in Landscape with crater (Fig. 104), and violent despair reminiscent of Munch in Shellholes, Delville Wood (Fig. 106). Thus far, ten pictures of Delville Wood have been identified (Harmsen 1980, 122). Some are small, quick sketches painted on wooden panels or on canvas pasted onto hardboard, while others are more resolved. Again their sequence is unsure, but examples are: Delville Wood, ten years later (Fig. 103), Landscape with crater (Fig. 104), Trees and trenches of Delville Wood (Fig. 105), Shell holes, Delville Wood (Fig. 106) and Delville Wood (Fig. 107). They were all painted in 1926 (Harmsen 1980, 121 to 125). Harmsen notes that the two major works of this series "are the large, dramatic canvases belonging to South Africa House, London, and the Pretoria Art Museum" (Harmsen 1980, 122).

It is interesting to note that while some of these works are subjective, fervent, highly emotive responses to the landscape, others' potent sense of futility have been somewhat tamed by an attempt to evoke a sense of the Cross on Calvary. This idea may have been suggested to her by Edith's poem in which she likens this spectacle to the empty tomb at Golgotha, but softens the sense of disillusion with the promise of the Resurrection (Harmsen 1980, 123). The cross-pollination of ideas between the sisters is most evident in the Delville Wood series of



1926 (Figs.103-110).

Harmsen notes a distinct resemblance between Nash's depictions of Delville Wood and Bertha's, except that while Nash evokes a sense of "eerily still" Surrealism, Bertha's depictions are far more "brutal in their Fauve style" (Harmsen 1980, 125). Harmsen suggests that Herbert Read's description of Paul Nash's war paintings (exhibited at the Leicester Galleries in May 1918) is equally applicable to Bertha's Delville Wood series (Figs.103-110). Read said he was:

...immediately convinced, because here was someone who could convey, as no other artist, the phantasmagoric atmosphere of No Man's Land. Other artists, such as Otto Dix in Germany [and, Harmsen adds, C. R. W. Nevinson in England] depicted the dreadful horror of the human side of war; but the aspect which Paul Nash revealed was the outrage on Nature, the unnatural, and therefore already in a sense the super-real (Harmsen 1980, 125).

However, Nash's work is a decidedly representational and perhaps intellectual response, whereas Bertha's is decidedly more visceral and emotive. Bertha does not include any figures such as Nash had - on occasion - used to depict or illustrate the historic event. While Nash was an acknowledged influence on her Hertfordshire work, by this time she had absorbed the influences of Matisse and the Fauves. This series was also exhibited in London, June 1926, the Dover Gallery, 1926 and in Cape Town, November 1927 (Harmsen 1980, 126). The Medici Society reproduced the South Africa House version. No work from the Dover Exhibition (which included fifteen works of Delville Wood (Figs. 103-110) and its environs, eleven views of Hertfordshire, eight Bruneval scenes and five versions of the Chantilly Woods) was sold (Harmsen 1980, 128). The Pretoria Art Museum and South Africa House in London accepted the Delville Wood painting (Fig.107) as a gift by the artist's family only years later, as it was apparently considered too harsh and uncompromising for contemporary tastes (Harmsen 1980, 128). Neither of the works sent to the Royal Academy was accepted for exhibition. Not all the criticism levelled at Bertha's work was negative, and some described her work as "vigorous with a decorative bent" and of giving the impression of "great loneliness and of enchanting, if strange effects of colour" (Harmsen 1980, 128). Later, in 1926, all Bertha's work was shipped back to South Africa.

A brief overview of the paintings done while in England and France reveals a period of intense experiment and almost haphazard changing of style and techniques. Consider the carefully structured regularity of design and composition in works such as Leighton House (1924) (Fig.71), Rubber factory, Harpenden (1924) (Fig.72) and Haycover (1924) (Fig.75). The reorganisation of the picture plane into neat, comfortable sections is contrasted by the use of quite brash, non-descriptive colour. Despite the naturalistic recognisable representation of form, the colours and composition suggest a de Chirico-esque quality of mystery and expectation. The influence of Fry may be discerned in Haycover (1924) (Fig.75) in the use of colour and repetition of simplified tree forms. These works appear to be quite grounded in reality, “earth bound” as it were.

The Chantilly Woods series (Figs.82-84) is far less concerned with naturalistic representation. Although the trees are recognisable, their colour is non-representational. There also seems to be far less emphasis on their relationship to the earth: that is, the trees seem to be somewhat suspended, their contact with the ground rather tenuous. More importance is given to their quivering, rather nervous linear qualities. The colour is again completely arbitrary in some cases. The skies are almost uniformly painted in the same blue. The looming architectural shapes of the English paintings and their careful structure makes way for a much more emphatic and exploratory calligraphic linearity.

The Bruneval series appears almost reckless and primitive in its colour and selection of shapes. It is suggested that Bertha, hesitant to begin painting again, may have needed the structure of the design in the English work in creating a composition. The Chantilly Woods series (Figs. 82-84) is far less reliant on this aspect, although she somewhat nervously appears to have gained confidence in self-expression and appears less concerned with tidy design. The Bruneval series almost aggressively appears to disregard the picturesque and shows a distinct preference for harsh primitive form and colour that may have been a cathartic release for Bertha from the boundaries of artistic convention. It is suggested that without these “preparatory” or exploratory works, she may not have found the means of expressing herself with such confidence and power in the Delville Wood series (Figs.103-

Bertha's work exhibited on the Imperial Art Exhibition in London in 1927 was, however, recognised by London critics as being superior in the South African context, but hers (and other modern work) was not appreciated by her compatriots. Other South African artists such as Neville Lewis, Edward Roworth, Ruth Prowse, Hugo Naude, Volschenk, Sydney Carter, Clément Sènèque, Jack Pieters, Crosland Robinson, Constance Penstone and Leo François, took part in this show. From these paintings, the reviewer P.G. Konnody, singled out Neville Lewis and Bertha's work for positive comment. Bertha's painting, Looking towards Swaziland (or Opal valley) (c.1922) (Fig.70) appears to have been enthusiastically received by others (Harmsen 1980, 137).

Bury tried to convince Bertha that her negativity about her work was ill founded, by arranging exhibitions in Johannesburg (Herbert Evans Gallery), Cape Town (The twenty-seventh annual exhibition of the South African Society of Artists, November, 1927) and Bloemfontein. This appears to have had little success, and the reviews appeared to cause her to doubt her artistic achievements. Bertha was bewildered and disappointed, and the hostility of some of the reviews plunged her into a bleak period of introspection. In a letter to Edith dated July 1927, she expresses a desire to destroy her work, but didn't, as she said: "So much of me has gone into the doing that I don't think I ought to be the one to do that. It is too much like suicide." (Harmsen 1980, 139).

Edith's support and encouragement of Bertha roused her from her apathy and despite her forswearing ever to exhibit anywhere in Africa again, she apparently arranged for the exhibition of her work in Johannesburg and Durban. The pictures (all small panels) sent to the ninth annual exhibition of the South African Academy in May 1928 in Johannesburg, were recorded as follows in the catalogue: Rubber factory at night, (a k a Rubber factory, Harpenden) (Fig.72), Field of oats, Young wheat, Road in Hertfordshire and Cornfield (the latter four works have not been positively identified and none of these are illustrated). It is not certain which works were exhibited in Durban but probably Baboon valley (Fig.67) was among them. That this painting and possibly four other larger works were not hung at the

Johannesburg exhibition suggests that they were rejected.

During 1928 and early 1929, Bertha did not paint but again submitted work to various group shows. For example in May 1929 Looking towards Swaziland (c.1920/21) (Fig. 70) was accepted for the tenth annual exhibition of the South African Academy (Harmsen 1980, 144). The criticism of her work was derogatory.

In a letter to Edith from Lekkerdraai in May 1929, Bertha expressed her intention to paint again. Harmsen suggests that the paintings may have been Hills, eastern Transvaal (nd) (Fig. 113), Small furrow (nd) (Fig. 114), Bend in the river, Lekkerdraai (nd) (Fig. 111) and The new furrow (nd) (Fig. 112). The latter, she suggests, is the earlier of the two.

That both Bend in the river, Lekkerdraai (Fig. 111) and The new furrow (Fig. 112) bear a strong, if involuntary, resemblance to Ruth's style is attributable to the fact that they may have been painted at Ruth's side and to Bertha's usual hesitancy after not painting for a long period of time. Harmsen states that 1929 to 1936 was a productive period for Bertha (Harmsen 1980, 145), during which time she painted some of her largest works. These paintings are characterised by large bold shapes, a confident use of intense, expressive but naturalistic colour and broad, if somewhat flattened shapes at the expense of illustrative detail. The composition of The new furrow (nd) (Fig. 112) is tightly controlled but evokes a sense of space and suppressed energy. By contrast, Hills, Eastern Transvaal (possibly pre-1931) (Fig. 113) appears less rigidly controlled and suggests a harshness implied by the apparently aggressive application of paint, the sculptural quality of the landmasses and an absence of illustrative detail.

The new furrow (nd. but first exhibited 1931) (Fig. 112), Bend in the river, Lekkerdraai (nd) (Fig. 111), Hills, Eastern Transvaal (nd. but first exhibited 1931) (Fig. 113) and Small furrow (nd) (Fig. 114) are possibly the first works Bertha attempted after returning from Europe. Of these, The new furrow (nd) (Fig. 112), now in the Pretoria Art Museum, is possibly the earliest (Harmsen 1980, 145). All the paintings, except Small furrow (nd) (Fig. 114), have a horizontal format, all have a high horizon, a range of mountains in the top third of the canvas,



and all have a winding strip of water or road that suggests space. Of these paintings, possibly the most aesthetically pleasing is The new furrow (nd) (Fig. 112). It is interesting to note Harmsen's comment that Bertha was engaged in the actual digging of this watercourse (Harmsen 1980, 145). The composition comprises a series of interlocking diagonal landmasses with the focal point where the furrow disappears from view. The tones are satisfying in their broad range. The paint application is sufficiently varied to encourage interest and avoid the blandness that seems to accompany those works where Bertha emulates Ruth's broader application of paint as in Bend in the river, Lekkerdraai (Fig. 111).

In the Academy show, Bertha exhibited her New (water) furrow (Fig. 112) and Hills in the Eastern Transvaal (Fig. 113) (and both were denoted as being "modern" in a new method of categorisation at this event). Again, her work was singled out for comment by the reviewer, albeit without much enthusiasm, but recognising her powerful and expressive means (Harmsen 1980, 158).

At the Herbert Evans gallery Bertha exhibited Ploughed (or Ploughing) land in Normandy (possibly Fig. 92). Here the first mention of the Everard Group as an unusual phenomenon was noted (Harmsen 1980, 159). Reviewers were "awed by Bertha Everard's work, and regarded her as a doyen of artists who needed 'no introduction'" (Harmsen 1980, 160). Harmsen suspects that this might have been as a result of Edith's "imposed appreciation", as she had been in charge of the pre-exhibition publicity (Harmsen 1980, 158).

On the day this exhibition opened, the *Rand Daily Mail* published the first of a three-part article in a regular feature: "The Highway of Women". The first article dealt with Bertha Everard and Bonnefoi, and refers to them as a "small but very notable colony of South African artists" (Harmsen 1980, 159). This series, although arguably of dubious critical merit, may inadvertently have been responsible for the appreciation of Bertha's work for a wider audience.

A major event during this time was the first national exhibition of contemporary art at the South African National Gallery in Cape Town, held between December and February 1931.



In this impressively large exhibition of about 200 works, it was noted with some alarm by various critics that none of the following artists had work exhibited there: Anton van Wouw, Moses Kottler, Pierneef, Dorothy Kay, Ruth Prowse, Gregoire Boonzaaier, Florence Zerffi, Gwelo Goodman, Irma Stern, Erich Mayer and George Pilkington. (Harmsen 1980, 160). It was also noted that neither Tinus de Jongh, Volschenk, Timlin nor Roworth were displayed (Harmsen 1980, 163). Notably, Bertha's absence did not warrant mention. Although both Ruth and Rosamund submitted work, Rosamund's Camelthorn in Winter (nd) (not illustrated) was criticised as being like a poster and "Ruth's Otter pool (nd) (not illustrated) as being "childish" (Harmsen 1980, 160). The selection of work for this exhibition aroused heated debate, the details of which are given in Harmsen (1980, 162-163).

The newly founded Academy for Fine Arts was the National Academy of Arts that was to be affiliated to the Royal Academy in England, and be run according to its rules. This was different from the South African Academy (a series of exhibitions held annually in Johannesburg from 1920-1950) and from the Suid-Afrikaanse Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns. Bertha appears to have concurred with the opinions of some reviewers and critics that some of South Africa's most modern artists were being discriminated against by the rejection of their work. This debate effectively highlighted the work of the Everard Group as a whole, as they seem to have had a growing number of admirers who expressed their dissatisfaction with the status quo (Harmsen 1980, 162). However, it is perhaps important to note that the generally conservative public may well have tended to side with the opinion of people such as F. de Guigne, who regarded modern art as "an insult to the intelligence", a "hideous vulgarity" (Harmsen 1980, 163). The patronising and, in retrospect, insular and unenlightened criticism of the critic Joan Boardman's views are probably a fair indication of the general perception of the public.

Lekkerdraai 1 (nd) (a.k.a. Evening in the Komati Valley) (Fig. 115) were first shown at the Everard Group exhibitions in 1935 in Johannesburg and Pretoria (Harmsen 1980, 176). This painting is referred to as "the Beethoven" by the family because of its size and what Harmsen calls its "audacious orchestration of forms and colours" (Harmsen 1980, 176). This painting is now in the South African National Gallery in Cape Town. It was the major work on the

large Everard Group exhibition of 1935 organised by the *Departement van Kuns en Kultuur* of the University of Pretoria. There were some one hundred and thirty-three paintings on display, covering all periods of the Everard Group's work (Harmsen 1980, 176). General J. C. Smuts opened the show on the 20<sup>th</sup> of October, indicating its significance and assuring its publicity. The reviews acknowledged the group's individualism and modernism in their personal renditions of the local South African landscape (Harmsen 1980, 177). Despite the prestigious nature of this exhibition and the critical acclaim of their work, Bertha's work does not appear to have been able to sustain the attention of the South African art world for long.

After the Pretoria showing, part of the exhibition was moved to the Rand Women's Club in Johannesburg. In conjunction with this, Rex Martienssen gave a talk on contemporary art. His references to the Everard Group's work state that their work was not in the classical tradition, and that it was to a degree illustrative. He also noted that it was

... much more than a representation: a rhythm of line and colour, an architectural quality of certain abstractions of form which went deeper than any mere surface initiation. Art was not imitation, but creation (Harmsen 1980, 177).

According to Harmsen (1980, 177, 178) in September 1936 the Everard Group participated in the general art display of the great Empire Exhibition held in Johannesburg, and in conjunction with the main show, held an independent exhibition which was opened by Professor G. E. Pearce from the Department of Architecture, University of the Witwatersrand. In his opening speech, Pearce paid tribute to their work for their sincerity, for not pandering to popular taste and in so doing, regarded them as pioneers in painting in the country. He predicted that their work would be regarded as the classics of the future. Suddenly, newspaper critics were encouraged to be far more positive about what was then perceived as their striking, novel and interesting modern manner and that they had established a niche in South African painting, and were therefore deserving of closer attention.

The other of Bertha's large Lekkerdraai paintings, Dawn on the Komati (nd) (Fig. 116) was

exhibited on the Eighteenth Annual Exhibition of the South African Academy in 1937.

Harmsen describes this work as being larger than, but similar to, the preceding Lekkerdraai 1 (Fig.115) painting, in subject, technique and colour. But she adds, its emotional impact is much greater and that “the artist has demonstrably achieved what she believed was essential in modern landscape painting ‘...an inward spirit which connects itself immediately with something felt to be divine’” (Harmsen 1980, 179 quoting Bertha’s own words from her article “Modern Art”, from the Common Room Magazine, vol. 1925-31).

Bertha, by now well in her sixties, painted one more large Lekkerdraai landscape and a small panel of “straggly saplings” (Harmsen 1980, 179). This painting is referred to as Lekkerdraai 2 (nd) (Fig.117). Harmsen notes that when compared to Lekkerdraai 1 (nd) (Fig.115) and Dawn on the Komati (nd) (Fig.116), this work shows a “striking change of style” (Harmsen 1980, 179). She points out that Lekkerdraai 2 (Fig.117) has a starkness that is as a result of the simple flat shapes and chalky pale colour, and that Bertha’s sense of design has outweighed the emotional content. Harmsen suggests that Bertha was on the verge of exploring new formal possibilities, but that instead of pursuing this, she chose to abandon painting. This painting appears to be the last in Bertha’s oeuvre (Harmsen 1980, 179-180).

Lekkerdraai 1, also known as Evening in the Komati valley or The Beethoven (nd) (Fig.115), was signed and first exhibited in 1935 at the South African National Gallery, while Lekkerdraai 2 (nd) (Fig.117) and not signed, as well as Dawn on the Komati (c.1936/7) (Fig.116) that was signed and first exhibited 1937 are interesting to compare. These works were probably painted between 1934 and 1938/9.

Lekkerdraai 1 (Fig.115) is possibly the most satisfying of the three paintings on a number of levels. The sheer scale of the horizontal canvas befits the vast landscape that it represents. The horizon almost obliterates the sky, with the focus confidently oriented earthwards. A bright sliver of the river, oddly obscured by a projection of the steeply sloping foreground, leads the eye from right to left across the landscape below in an uncharacteristically jagged movement. The light source appears to come from behind the distant mountains, highlighting a fragment of hillside, while the rest of the landscape is bathed in nebulous shadow. The

shapes are alternatively languid or fragmented, implying a heaviness and a certain melancholy. Curiously, the focal point appears to be a dark reflection midway in the river, the reason for its shape and position being unclear. The trees that dot the opposite bank seem to be an unnecessary inclusion, and their descriptive detail intrusive. Perhaps their inclusion serves to clarify one's sense of scale.

Dawn on the Komati (c. 1936/7) (Fig.116) is similar in composition, although far more languid. Again Bertha's insistent addition of descriptive detail, this time in the form of some disappointingly badly drawn huts, intrude on the overall sense of massive scale and depth of space.

Lekkerdraai 2 (Fig.117), arguably her last major work, contains the same compositional elements, but the application of paint is remarkably different. The paint is applied in broad areas to describe the geographic forms that constitute the major part of the composition. Again Bertha has included not only trees scattered on the distant banks, but also, rather incongruously, a small aloe which clings to the edge of the rocky precipice which juts out from the foreground. The edge of this projection is sharp and its geometric shape is highlighted by the contrasting softer curves. The painting is dark toned, the paint appears oily, there is a repetitiveness to the brush-marks that repudiate any attempts at naturalism, although it may be argued that this was not her conscious or unconscious objective. The element of design to which Harmsen draws attention is evident, but Harmsen suggests that it is at the expense of emotionality (Harmsen 1980, 179). It is suggested that design does not automatically exclude emotion.

Four young trees (nd) (Fig.118) is the last recorded example of Bertha's work. Bertha's signature is quite evident at the bottom right-hand corner. One may deduce then that this work held some significance for her. Certainly, its relatively small size suggests that its importance was personal. The brushwork is loose and unselfconscious, the overall tonality light. The composition is unstructured and the placement of the four saplings suggests a delicacy, a newness and perhaps fragility. This painting, it is suggested, is neither a turning point, nor a suggestion of things to come. The trees are not dissimilar to those she painted at



Chantilly Woods (Figs. 82-84) in France in their tenuous relationship to the earth and nervousness of line, and reminiscent of those at Delville Wood (Figs. 103-110). Bertha's previous anthropomorphism of trees suggests that this small sketch may have had a similar intention.

In 1938 the New Group, perhaps one of South Africa's most significant art associations, was formed by a number of dedicated young artists who endorsed Modernism. Its founders were Gregoire Boonzaaier, Terence McCaw and Walter Battiss. Membership, which was by invitation only, was initially limited to thirty. Arnold (1996, 12) notes that of the initial seventeen exhibitors, six were women.

The earliest members were Maud Sumner, Enslin du Plessis, Gregoire Boonzaaier, Terence McCaw, Frieda Lock, Walter Battiss, Charles Peers, Edward Wolfe, Moses Kottler, Anton Hendriks, Florence Zerffi, Joyce Ordebrown, J. Pope-Ellis, Alexis Preller, Lippy Lipshitz, Rene Joubert, Elza Dziomba, M. Hughes, G. Young, Francois Krige, Maggie Laubser and Rene Graetz. Notably absent from this list are Stern and Pierneef. The New Group's aim was to educate the general public by exhibiting selected modern work of a high standard, in order to raise the standard of South African art that it felt was often amateurish or stale and thereby visibly endorse the tenets of Modernism (Arnold 1996, 12).

The New Group's first exhibition was held in Cape Town in April 1938, then in 1939 in Pretoria and thereafter in Johannesburg. The Everard Group did not participate in these early ventures. In 1943, however, three members of the Everard Group participated as invited guests and not as members, namely Ruth, Rosamund and Edith. A reviewer from *The Star* regarded their contributions as "noteworthy" but the Everard Group did not participate in the 1945 New Group exhibition in Cape Town, nor in the 1948 show (Harmsen 1980, 188-189).

However, all the members of the Everard Group were well represented on the South African Academy exhibition of 1948. Bertha entered Lekkerdraai 1 (nd) (Fig. 115) that was catalogued as Evening in the Komati valley and not for sale (Harmsen 1980, 189). In 1948 only one work by Ruth was accepted by the Tate Gallery in London, under the auspices of the



South African Arts Association of Cape Town. The reception of the exhibition was reportedly “lukewarm” (Harmsen 1980, 191).

According to Harmsen (1980, 195-197), in 1948, Edith arranged a joint exhibition of her and Ruth’s work, which was opened by the provocative Walter Battiss. He diagnosed the reason for the country’s artistic ills as a result of too many artists painting too much, the population’s reliance or subservience to the views and criticisms from Europe, and a dearth of qualified critics. He also made favourable comments on the Everard Group’s retreat from society to work. Similarly, *The Star* reported, with enthusiastic detail, on the canvases of both Ruth and Edith. Both these artists were represented at the Gainsborough Gallery exhibition in Johannesburg that same year. As Harmsen notes, the Everard Group appeared to be reluctant to sell their work and expected what may have been considered high prices even for small pictures but observes that they were prepared to negotiate should a gallery or institution express interest in purchasing work. A painting by Ruth was purchased by the Johannesburg Municipal Art Gallery, but according to Harmsen, the Everard Group’s work was seldom on public display in the gallery. The reason for this is unclear but may have been partially due to a general lack of interest in all but conservative landscape painting by the viewing public.

In 1937 Ernest Lezard, a well-known art auctioneer and connoisseur, who had a long history of perceptive reviews of South African painting, regarded Bertha as “one of the greatest of our South African landscape painters” and referred to her work as “modernist” without the usual derogatory tones with which this nomenclature had previously been laden. Lezard also said that Bertha’s work “might almost have been termed classical”, and that her “large canvases were individualistic, but not revolutionary”. He remarked that, in her words, her sojourn in Paris had enabled her to convey her “real thoughts in paint” and that “no good artist can remain at exactly the same point in his work if he is developing healthily” (Harmsen 1980, 180). He also quotes Edith as saying:

I feel the name ‘Modern’ is much abused these days, and certainly Mrs Everard’s work does not belong to the extreme school of so called modern art. Since it is always definitely representative, although not merely imitative, some of her real early work is strikingly like her later in its breadth and subordination of detail. She is not a prolific painter because every picture has made such a big demand on

her physically and mentally - each one is a real bit of her life (Harmsen 1980, 180).

During World War 2 (1938-1945) Bertha had to take over the farming (Addleson 2000, 32). As a result, she accomplished little else. During the late 1940s and 50s, Bertha and her entourage restlessly moved from place to place, attending to her grandchildren's schooling and education.

In 1952 the tercentenary of van Riebeeck's arrival in the Cape was celebrated, with, among other events, an impressively large exhibition at the Castle of two hundred and sixteen artworks by artists from around the country. Thereafter it went on tour and was considered to be "a high water mark in South African art history" (Harmsen 1980, 200). Bertha, Edith and Ruth were represented. In Pretoria, the Transvaal Association of Arts staged a smaller show where Bertha's small Delville Wood, painting catalogued as Landscape with crater, (1926) (Fig.104) was borrowed from the University of Pretoria. No other Everard Group members were represented (Harmsen 1980, 200).

The following year the Cape branch of the South African Association of Arts compiled an exhibition entitled A Century of South African Art 1853-1953. This show was taken to Bulawayo in former Rhodesia as part of the Rhodes centenary. The Everard Group was not represented (Harmsen 1980, 200).

In 1955 A Historical Survey of Painting in South Africa was mounted in the Ivan Solomon Hall of the Pretoria Technical College by the Transvaal branch of the South African Association of Arts. Maria Stein-Lessing convened this show and its excellence was acknowledged by the fact that it was photographed in its entirety and published as an educational slide programme (Harmsen 1980, 201). All of the Everard Group members were represented by two paintings each. Bertha's paintings Looking towards Swaziland (c. 1920/21) (Fig.70) and Wag 'n bietjies (nd) (a.k.a. The three witches) (Fig.57) were shown. So were Edith's two works, Dargel falls (nd) and Hollyhocks (nd), Ruth's Flowering pear tree (nd) and Avignon (nd), as well as Rosamund's Petra (nd) and Gravelotte (nd). One painting by each of the Everard Group was reproduced, among the relatively few selected for

this purpose, in black and white in the catalogue (Harmsen 1980, 201). In Stein-Lessing's foreword to this catalogue, she singles out the Everard Group's work as important in its emphasis on transforming landscape into design which she regarded as a first move towards abstraction (Harmsen 1980, 201).

It may be seen as significant that Stein-Lessing astutely evaluated the Everard Group's work as comparable to Pierneef's, and recognised their precociousness in the South African art context. Harmsen emphasises that the group's relative isolation and independence and critical astuteness was largely responsible for their distinctive style as well as their relative obscurity in the art world (Harmsen 1980, 206). In an effort to bring the group's work to the public's attention, Stein-Lessing gave a talk on their work on the SABC. This was later published in collaboration with the South African Association for the Advancement of Knowledge and Culture in Our Art 2 in 1961. She stressed the avant-garde qualities of the group's art stating:

They play their role - and it is one of considerable importance - in the development of South African art from an earlier rendering of the country's landscape into the stress of stylistic pattern in the sense of Post-Impressionist development of modern art (Stein Lessing in Harmsen 1980, 206).

As a result of her efforts, the Everard Group's work was included in subsequent books on South African art that, hitherto, had not included them. As Harmsen indicates, their work is mentioned but rarely illustrated in publications between 1961-1967 (Harmsen 1980, 206-207).

Shortly after this show, Edith, now eighty-five years old, again organised an Everard Group show, this time it was to be under the aegis of the South African Association of Arts in Van Schaik's Gallery in Pretoria, which opened on the 29<sup>th</sup> May 1956. On this show, some of Bertha's earlier work was exhibited such as Krantz (nd) (Fig. 42), Three witches (nd) (Fig. 67), and View towards Swaziland (c. 1920/21) (catalogued as Opal valley) (Fig. 70) as well as Rosamund's Petra (nd) and Gravelotte (nd) and Ruth's Flowering pear tree (nd), Avignon (nd) as well as a new one by her namely Dangerous sea (nd) (or Angry sea). The last mentioned was regarded as "outstanding" by a *Pretoria News* critic (Harmsen 1980, 206-

207).

Bertha died in 1965 after complications arising from her diabetes (pers com LEH 2001). The family agreed to release many of the Group's paintings for sale on exhibitions such as at the Adler Fielding Galleries in 1967. This gallery published an illustrated catalogue with an accompanying introduction as "effusive, propagandistic and bombastic as the invitation" which had invited patrons to see "one of the most important art historical occasions we have yet had the honour to present" (Harmsen 1980, 207). Virtually all the Johannesburg newspapers carried glowing accounts of the exhibition and art galleries, large business concerns and private collectors bought examples of the work, while it appears that younger artists were "'amazed and excited that such work had been produced in South Africa at such an early date'" (Harmsen 1980, 207). According to Everard Haden (2000, 31), the family did not receive anything from the sale of the works as the gallery went bankrupt.

The exhibition was transferred from Johannesburg to the Pretoria Art Museum, with a less effusive and more scholarly introduction to the accompanying catalogue by Professor Albert Werth. Again, the reviewers were extraordinarily complimentary. The National Film Board published a selection of key works from the exhibition as an educational slide programme. It was this exhibition that inspired Harmsen to write the book The Women of Bonnefoi (1980) (Harmsen 2000, 31). From Pretoria the exhibition moved to the Tatham Art Gallery in Pietermaritzburg, where Valerie Leigh, the curator, acquired some works for the permanent municipal collection.

Esme Berman was another ardent supporter of the Everard Group's work and included them in her essays in the encyclopaedic work Art and Artists of South Africa (1970). Her second book The Story of South African Painting (1975) also contains several illustrations of their work. This essay was enlarged in her slide programme, published in 1979, that illustrated seldom seen examples of their work. Berman also acted as advisor to the Rembrandt Art Foundation's series of short films featuring the South African landscape seen through the eyes of its artists. As a result, the film on the Eastern Transvaal is devoted almost entirely to the work of the Everard Group, while their paintings are used regularly when the focus falls



in other parts of the country (Harmsen 1980, 207).

In 1978 the South African National Gallery acquired Lekkerdraai 1 (Fig. 115), its placement and reception at the time Harmsen regarded as befitting of its owner (Harmsen 1980, 207).

In Harmsen's publication The Women of Bonnefoi (1980) some 229 paintings are recorded by the older Everard painters (Addleson 2000, 6), 96 by Bertha, 52 by Edith, 54 by Ruth, 23 by Rosamund and 18 by other artists (Harmsen 1980, 221-233). Addleson estimates that there are nearly 100 Everard paintings in public collections and about nine in South African corporate collections. Of this older group, Edith was the most prolific, but Harmsen estimates that the total artistic output of the four senior painters does not exceed 500 works (Addleson 2000, 6). Addleson also notes that there are between 70 and 80 books, catalogues and articles published about the Everard painters, compared to the mere 56 on Irma Stern (who died in 1966, one year after Bertha) but that in spite of this, the Everards have not received great public recognition (Addleson 2000, 7).

Two reasons become apparent for Bertha's work being relatively unknown. One is perhaps due to her dislike of crowded city life, as she preferred the quiet of the farms. While her work was exhibited fairly frequently, she worked largely in isolation, not pandering to current styles but assimilating what was suitable to her temperament reaching her own form of Modernism independently. Bertha remained aloof from other painters showing little concern for what her compatriots were doing. An opinionated woman who could make incisive comments on what she perceived to be work lacking in aesthetics and technique (Harmsen 1980, 206), she may have offended those who might have been encouraged to include her in the contemporary art world.

In 1927, Bertha shunned self-advertisement saying: "How horrible self advertisement is. I will never do any more again. I now retire for ever." (Addleson 2000, 2). However, her contemporary, Irma Stern, devoted her life to painting and promotion of her work, despite the initial harsh criticism of her style. Stern's outspoken and frequently publicised criticism of her critics and her apparent unconcern at the bourgeois opinions about her flagrant lifestyle,



played a not inconsiderable part in her acceptance in the art world. In Bertha's case, self-promotion was considered unbecoming, and was prompted by her ever-present sister Edith's urging to express herself and not to be dictated to by current trends.

The other reason for Bertha's lack of recognition, this research suggests, is that acceptance of Modernism in South Africa was affected by the likes of Roworth, whose stranglehold on the largely uneducated public's opinion was undisputed. His patronising and patriarchal attitude to Bertha's work is noted in Harmsen (1980). Roworth also exhibited on the 1910 Arts and Crafts Exhibition in Johannesburg, where Bertha was awarded a gold medal for the landscape Mid-Winter on the Komati River (Fig. 39) (Harmsen 1980, 31 - 32). This painting was in a style of which he would approve. He also exhibited with her on the Imperial Art Exhibition in London in 1927, where a reviewer from *The Star* highlighted the work of both Bertha and Neville Lewis, but not Roworth (Harmsen 1980, 137).

Roworth wrote an article for *The Studio* publication, *Art of The British Empire Overseas*, called *Landscape Art in South Africa* in 1917. In this he ignored Bertha's work altogether, as well as that of Wallace Paton, an artist, architect and acquaintance of Bertha's. Roworth excluded Oerder and Pierneef, the former having returned to Holland briefly, and the latter having begun to move away from his academic style towards abstraction. He included Allerly Glossop, an acquaintance of Bertha's whose work she disapproved, J.S. Moreland, Hugo Naude, C. Penstone-Robinson, Gordon Pilkington, Ruth Prowse, McCulloch Robertson, G.S. Smithard, Nita Spilhaus, Sidney Taylor and Pieter Wenning (Harmsen 1980, 56).

Roworth's mural for the Herbert Baker Church of St Phillip, Cape Town (circa 1912), came under Bertha's criticism. She described it in a letter to Edith as "terrible, really awful wall paintings", condemning them outright (Harmsen 1980, 78). Both Bertha and Roworth were of a similar age (she seven years his senior), both had studied at the Slade, and according to Berman, both were students of Herkomer although Roworth's name does not appear on the comprehensive list of pupils. Both came to South Africa in 1902, whereas he settled in Cape Town, returning briefly to Florence to study fresco painting. Harmsen notes that despite his

overseas travel, Roworth's work remained "very British, Romantic and Academic" (Harmsen 1980, 78). By 1922, Bertha's painting had changed significantly from the British academicism of her Mid-Winter on the Komati River (1910) (Fig. 39), whereas Roworth's stubborn resistance to Modernism is well known (Harmsen 1980, 79).

Had Bertha been able to defy the criticism of these academicians, and had she been as committed to self-promotion as Stern, for example, she may have been more successful. Likewise, it could be speculated that the Everard Group's renown may have been advanced by Everard Haden's proposal (in 1982, before the death of her mother Ruth) to open an Everard Group Museum at Bonnefoi, had it come to fruition.

In 1998, Jill Addleson (Curator of Collections, Durban Art Gallery) was invited by the Standard Bank Gallery in Johannesburg to curate an exhibition of paintings by the Everard Group. She named it The Everard Phenomenon. It included all nineteen works by this group in the Standard Bank Corporate Collection, together with their most important works from other South African art museum collections, as well as one work from the private collection of R. Fryde in Johannesburg (Kentish poppyfield) (Fig. 11). This exhibition featured paintings by Edith King, Bertha Everard, her daughters Ruth Everard Haden and Rosamund Steenkamp, and also by Leonora Everard Haden (Ruth's daughter) and Nichola Leigh, one of Leonora's daughters. In all, fifty-eight works were selected. The exhibition opened in June 2000 at the Standard Bank National Festival of the Arts in Grahamstown, then at the Standard Bank Gallery, Johannesburg, and later at the Tatham Art Gallery, Pietermaritzburg. Addleson notes that the exhibition in Grahamstown was poorly attended (1490 visitors as opposed to the usual average of 3000) but that there seemed to be "a whole lot more academics" (Addleson 2001, 4). At the Tatham Art Gallery there was reportedly "a fair increase on average". This, it was noted, may have been because "Leonora Everard Haden and her daughters live there and are well-known figures in the art world" (Addleson 2001, 4).

Addleson notes that three Everard paintings were auctioned at Stephan Welz & Co in March 2000 in Cape Town. Edith King's sold for R4000-R6000, Bertha's R6000-R9000, and Ruth's R450 000. Alan Crump maintains that the Everard's work has not depreciated in

monetary value and that they are now highly sought after by private and public collectors in South Africa. He also points out that: “It is naive to believe that artists achieve artistic immortality without marketing, continual public exposure to the media, art exhibitions held in big cities and auction sales.” (Crump 2000, 3). He goes on to say that the reason behind curating this exhibition was to “add a new dimension to South African Art” by continuing research begun by Harmsen (in the book The Women of Bonnefoi, 1980) and his own interest and growing realisation of the importance of their work. Crump also points out that landscape painting:

...has always been somewhat of a tricky subject. Much of this genre has degenerated into escapist and sentimental work that often results in kitsch... Fortunately the Everard Group was untainted by this kind of commercialism. Their works of the Eastern Transvaal, with their unique and independent vision, expressed the mysteries which lay beneath as well as above the surface of the land... Someday they may be reclassified as the equivalent in South African visual arts of the Bronte family in English literature. Certainly, had this Group lived abroad, their legacy may even have enjoyed the status of a Bloomsbury Group (Crump 2000, 4 and 5).

Harmsen (2000, 6) notes that the Group’s work was not underrated but largely unknown. She says that in her research she gathered that their work was at “the vanguard of modern art” but “inevitably aroused the ire of the conservative and outspoken critics”. She goes on to suggest that this hurt Bertha’s ego especially, but that it also brought them into the public eye. Also she says that when they stopped exhibiting in the 1950s, their renown faded. She points out that the group’s work was considered significantly important enough to be written about in the Our Art 2 publication, and several shown at historical and thematic group exhibitions that have taken place since the 1940s (Harmsen 2000, 6).

Harmsen also notes that there is nothing cerebral about the group’s work, although, “since they had enjoyed academic training, their work is more calculated” and that Bertha agonised about composition, texture and tone” (Harmsen 2000, 8). What Harmsen meant by her remark this research finds difficult to ascertain. All Bertha’s work has evidence of intellectual or cerebral activity. The suggestion that cerebral therefore excludes emotional is an arguable conclusion. In the research of Bertha’s work, it is evident that more than just

those two elements had significant roles to play in the production of her painting. As a committed artist, mother, farmer and missionary, one can assume many and varied influences on her life and work. Influenced by Victorian morals, despite her rejection of some of the more bourgeois aspects, and being a white Englishwoman in South Africa to boot, adds to the weight of possible influences.

#### **CHAPTER 4: Faith and religion: Motivation or hindrance? Bertha's role as missionary and teacher**

According to Everard Haden (pers com LEH 2001), Edith and Bertha were Anglicans for the most part of their adult lives. Everard Haden suggests that Edith experienced some sort of spiritual revelation before coming to South Africa and commemorated this by celebrating the occasion as a second birthday or re-birth day. It is not known whether Bertha had the same experience. However, Edith appears to have been more certain of their religion and faith than Bertha and encouraged Bertha to regard missionary work as a Christian duty. Bertha apparently considered changing to Roman Catholicism later in life, perhaps after the death of Rosamund, but it appears that she remained Anglican.

Neither woman appears to have had any tutoring or instruction to assist them in missionary work among the black labourers on Bertha's farms. Bertha bemoaned this fact frequently (TAG letters) and those clergymen whose advice she sought seemed incapable of answering her queries (TAG undated letter no 76).

In order to ascertain some of the motives and experiences of some well-known missionaries in southern Africa, David Chichester's Savage Systems: Colonial and Comparative Religion in Southern Africa (1996) has proved helpful.

Chichester (1996) studies the meaning, construction and definition of religion in specific areas of the world, and claims this work is a critical history of comparative religion in southern Africa. He examines the emergence of concepts of "religion" and "religions" on a colonial frontier, with a detailed analysis of the ways in which European travellers, missionaries, settlers and government agents, as well as indigenous Africans, engaged in the comparison of alternate religious ways of life as one dimension of the inter-cultural context. He focuses on the nineteenth century frontier relationship and includes a discourse about "otherness" that was established during this period. He argues that it is still currently identifiable. While drawing a distinction between religion and superstition that provided a



basic framework for their comparative religions, he suggests that missionaries also advanced morphological and genealogical comparisons to make sense out of Xhosa beliefs and practices.

Early missionaries in South Africa regarded the apparent lack of religion (in the form of priesthoods, temples, practices of idolatry) as an obstacle to Christianity. Xhosa superstition (not designated as religion) proved a similar obstacle to Christianity as it was considered pagan worship.

Chichester (1996) suggests that most missionaries proposed that Xhosa beliefs and practices had degenerated from an ancient religion, arguing that the Xhosa had descended from the ancient Near East. Through analysis of language and customs, missionaries in the eastern Cape developed a genealogy for the Xhosa that they were the Arabs of southern Africa.

Rev. J. Philip, a missionary administrator in southern Africa, suggested that Xhosa superstition developed from an original ignorance. The controversial Philip, who expanded work of the London Missionary Society in southern Africa begun in 1819, defended Khoikhoi rights and advocated British interests in his two-volume defence of mission work, Researches in South Africa (1828). This was designed, among other things, to promote the image of the mission in Britain, saying that the Christian mission was good not only for “natives”, among whom it was “scattering the seeds of civilisation, social order and happiness” but also for “extending British influence, and British Empire” (Chichester 1996, 89). Their impetus was two-fold and therefore not strictly theological.

Missionaries distinguished only between an “undifferentiated mass of superstition” and what was regarded as genuine religion. It was felt that if Africans were not brought under the influence of pure Christianity, they must be left to fall under the influence of superstition and infidelity, thus advancing a theory of progress (Chichester 1996, 89, 90). This might imply that the theory of social Darwinism may have been formulated to some extent on research recorded and experienced by working missionaries.

Some Wesleyan missionaries maintained that the Xhosa were degraded and ignorant. This theory of degradation was popular in London in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and promoted by the Archbishop of Dublin, Richard Whately, who said in 1854: "All savages are degenerated remnants of more civilised races." (Chichester 1996, 94) This strategy of denial of a religious consciousness was a useful one that suited the interests of the European settlers in the 1820s and 1830s in their presence and claims on land in the eastern Cape. The Xhosa had only recently been driven out of their land, but settlers were led to believe that they were staking claims on vacant land. The Xhosa's persistent theft of the settlers' cattle was carried out with what was termed "almost a religious devotion" (Chichester 1996, 95) and the Xhosa's retaliation was said to have stemmed from their lack of religion and their lack of a sense of obligation (Appleyard in Chichester 1996, 96).

This implied lack of morality in the Xhosa enabled the British to act against them without moral restraint. Therefore, the denial of the religious and moral character of the Xhosa was clearly located as a strategy on the frontier battlefield, and against the efforts of liberal politicians in London who were investigating the treatment of aboriginals in British colonies. Liberal politicians and humanitarians such as Saxe Bannister who wanted to end slave trade and were concerned about the displacement of indigenous people from their land, argued that it was not possible to justify the British course of destroying those "whose only crime was that they preceded the British in the possession of lands which the British wanted to enjoy to their exclusion" (Bannister in Chichester 1996, 95, 96).

Bertha's mission work may or may not have been informed directly by the above ideas. It is very possible that it was in a general sense, if her letters are any indication of her stance in these matters. She did appear to want to "improve" the character of the farm labourers by establishing schools for that purpose and engaging in active mission work. This matriarchal attempt to instil what she believed to be a superior sense of morality through Christian indoctrination and Eurocentric education, in the apparent absence of their own, was often thwarted by the eventual singular lack of interest shown by the labourers and their children in either field. Bertha was at times forgiving of what she saw as their "lapses". She said in a letter to Edith:

...forgive the poor brown folk any of their shortcomings. It is hard for us to keep upon the tight rope. Well nigh impossible for them. They who positively love sin can scarcely be expected to avoid it (TAG undated letter no 64).

Initially, at least, Bertha had remarked on how gratifying it was to have such a good turnout at her services: "I am feeling very happy about my natives" (TAG undated letter no 7), but the number of labourers attending seemed to have dwindled drastically by the 1930s. She expressed concern at not being fully conversant in their language: "... oh I wish I could speak to them in my own language. I wish I could get a little more help. I feel such a stupid old thing. If they all understood Dutch it wouldn't be so bad but not half do" (TAG undated letter no 113). She insisted that her children learn the local black language, which they all did. Although the language Zulu is specified by Bertha herself, it is unclear whether this was in fact the most prevalent black language spoken by her labourers, as a number of other languages such as Sepedi, Tswana and Sotho may have been spoken in the area. She wrote to Edith from Bonnefoi:

Our children sang two hymns in Kaffir quite beautifully. 'The King of Love' and 'All hail the Power of Jesus' name'. I shall teach them psalms and hymns in Kaffir daily it is a splendid thing to do. Also Ruth is going to do reading and diction daily. She shall know Zulu (TAG undated letter no 76).

It was in the late 1920s that Bertha's crisis of faith came to a head, brought on, no doubt, by a number of different reasons. This research suggests that it showed its first appearance in the Delville Wood series (Figs.103-110) that she painted in France in 1926. As previously mentioned, Everard Haden suggests that although Bertha remained a Christian, she had considered converting to Catholicism, and that it was for this reason Leonora was sent to a Catholic school, St Mary's Diocesan, in Johannesburg (pers com LEH 2001). Bertha became aware of the difficulty of the task she had set herself, that of instructing blacks in a language foreign to them, and by preaching the concept of Christian morality. Disheartened, she wrote to Edith: "K service just over. I feel nearly in tears about it. Somehow I couldn't make them understand about the gospel. John 2:1 or at least I did it very badly" (TAG undated letter no 116). However, it is important to note that Bertha's decision to curtail her missionary work was due to an instruction given by the church in 1929. She was obviously embarrassed and

hurt by this and expressed this in a letter to Edith saying:

We had four padres at Lekkerdraai all at once. Father Hill, Father Hepsworth. Mr. Tonkin and the native priest. The outcome of much talk between Father Hill and the natives chiefly Jeremy and the priest is that Father Hill has 'ordered' *me* to leave the whole thing alone as the natives object to my way of going on!!! Do not get angry and above all do not write protesting *please* don't. I shall not tell you all the silly details. So I am free of mission work and so are you. I shall never go with the churches again if I can avoid it....So ends 14 years of struggle and expense. The congregation at Lekkerdraai has dwindled to two and Bonnefoi practically to nothing but who cares I don't (TAG letter no 177 dated 1929).

That the following years were spent in fervent church building makes for interesting speculation about her intentions. Bertha was not without empathy and concern for her "boys". She wrote: "We opened the native school last night Monday. Twenty turned up, but so far not one child. However the boys are the most important." (TAG undated letter no 112). Bertha also encouraged farmers nearby to allow their labourers to attend night school, but this was not successful (TAG undated letter no 112).

She expresses empathy at the sight of the black men trudging home after attending night school and a long days labour on the farm: "I can hear the boys coming home from school. How late for the poor things to walk all the way from Brakspruit isn't it?" (TAG undated letter no 112). Bertha's de-sexualising of black men by referring to them as "boys" suggests a maternal rather than an equal relationship. This may underscore her apparent perception of them as "inferior" and in need of guidance.

However, her complete miscomprehension about the black women's "laziness" and disinclination to do a stitch more than was expected from them, suggests a harshness and lack of empathy toward her own sex. Women were women but men were "boys". Projecting her need for endless and selfless labour to achieve some semblance of self-esteem, she ignores the fact that these women, being paid a pittance, had no such agenda. Bertha argues that what they were being paid was fitting of their work, but it is known that the majority of black workers were poorly paid, especially women. In a letter to Edith complaining about her perception of the black women, Bertha wrote:



It is this that makes the trouble for we have to employ women-oh! How I detest native women when I have to get work out of them. They are paid 1/- a day and food but they grumble and dispute as though they were slaves. They are so slow that it is a costly business getting those rough acres cut. However with 9 women and seven boys we have cut a considerable number of bundles and carried and stacked about 400 (TAG undated letter no 172).

Victorian morality presupposed that cleanliness was akin to Godliness, and the black labourers' indifference to Bertha's demands in this area often led to bitter resentment and dismissal for example, of the cook at Bonnefoi. Bertha complained of his dirtiness and sores, and requested that her next cook be given a thorough medical check-up before he was employed (TAG letter no 170 dated 28.1.1928). Chichester also draws attention to the European distaste for blacks' apparent lack of hygiene. When Christian missionaries suggested soap and water in lieu of their customary animal fat and ochre, laughter was aroused by the suggestion. One missionary was ridiculed by his staff when he forbade them to touch the roasting meat on the fire with their hands, advocating the use of a stick instead. This concept of cleanliness was foreign, and indeed, regarded as ridiculous by blacks. So too Bertha struggled (and complained) with instilling this foreign, ridiculous idea in her workers, even with reference to Bury, of whom she wrote: "K's [Bury's] want of method and dirty habits disgusts people and they get careless in consequence." (TAG undated letter no 101).

It may have been believed that some blacks wanted to adopt British customs. Bertha complimented the black catechist who appears to have ascribed to many of her values regarding Christian faith and education (TAG undated letter no 115).

Chichester notes that a perception, advanced by J.M. Bowker, a spokesman for the Mfengu, that as a conquered people, with the spirit of an independent nation gone, there was a desire (by the Mfengu) to adopt British manners and customs. Blatantly advocating conquest as the only formula for "Christian civilisation" in southern Africa, Bowker called the Aboriginal Protection Society, the anti-slavery movement and other philanthropic institutions as "things of naught". He argued that Christian mission had been a "perfect failure" and that instead a "firm hand and enlightened Government" would have had greater effect in "civilising and



Christianising the Kaffirs” (Chichester 1996, 101).

Bowker, like others, firmly believed that people aspired to imitate their superiors in matters of custom and religion, and suggested that if the British Government really believed Christianity to be a superior way of life, they had a responsibility to teach “savage nations” by means of conquest “to fear and respect, to stand in awe of a nation whose manners and customs, whose religion, it is beneficial and desirable for them to adopt” (Chichester 1996, 101).

Bertha’s proselytising was not based on such draconian principles. But it was a common theory adopted by the settlers to treat Africans with a firm, dictatorial hand, presumably “in their best interests”. Also, to teach by example, their “superior” British customs that they might in return emulate them in an attempt to “improve” on their “degraded” status.

Bertha’s response to two very different visiting black missionaries reveals her preference for what she perceived to be the more “gentlemanly” of the two. Quietly spoken, reserved, yet not without pride and ambition, with an ability to converse in many languages, Josias Mofokeng appealed to Bertha’s sensibilities. In this letter to Edith, Bertha’s admiration for him is clear:

The teacher Josias came-on [sic] he arrived seven in the evening. Short, thick set with a smooth fat face and nice expression. Quiet and well behaved. Speaks four languages. Is a Basuto. Lost his wife during the epidemic. Educated by Archdeacon Fogarty and some of that lot in the Free State. Father a Christian before he was born. Means to become a catechist but is not yet one. Is delighted with the place and school but discouraged by the apathy among the natives here (TAG undated letter no 115).

The other visitor, a Mr Adams and his wife, were less successful. He was described as uncouth, vulgar, loud, lazy and undeserving of either her time or any contribution from the church fund. In Bertha’s defence, her assessment of his character was perhaps correct. Nevertheless her Victorian ideals and generalisations were clearly based on the perception that in order to be a worthy “man of the cloth” appearances and behaviour were of paramount importance. Bertha was offended by what she saw as vulgarity, irrespective of race or

colour, although it may be argued that those who were so described were often not familiar with what constituted “gentlemanly” behaviour. Her ire was especially invoked by laziness and she was outspoken about her dislike of this habit or inclination. Of Mr and Mrs Adams she wrote:

I was mad with the Adamses because except for the service at L'draai he did nothing, nothing. I mean in the way of Kraal visiting. The fact is he is not at all religious, only interested in collecting copy for some silly book and in organising finance. There isn't a particle of Christ about him. He felt I did not care for him in the end and that I utterly disapproved of his attitude. I did not give him the money I collected from the church (£4 about) but am sending it to the Diocesan Fund. This annoyed him horribly. The fact is I couldn't trust him, he is much too grasping. Besides all the people contributing thought it was for the white man's church so why deceive them. Besides I hate the natives even more than I hate most [not legible] so why give them that money. I was glad when I heard the Adamses go off. I did not enjoy that visit one bit. He is such a terribly worldly sensual conscienceless creature and she's just as sensual and otherwise ordinary, without his brains. I am so sick of the church, don't even want to see another clerical number. They all seem utter humbugs or else complete asses, generally sentimental ones. So that is finished for life. Unfortunately I have Bishop Karney coming in March. It will be difficult for me to endure. (TAG letter no 170 dated 28.1.1928).

Despite her serious misgivings about the church and her participation in it, Bertha was responsible for the building of churches for both the black and white communities in her area. She was convinced that the Christian faith was important enough for her to forgo painting in the interim. Whether this doggedness was as a result of Edith's council, Bertha's own faith, a desire to atone for her sin of questioning her faith, or a desire to be seen as a devout and exemplary member of the community is not clear.

It has been suggested that European civilisation has been responsible for a greater destruction of the aboriginal population than the slave trade due to its aggressive nature in enforcing laws and ideologies by threat of force (Chichester 1996, 101). Settlers were outraged by these accusations, but consoled by the fact that self-critique was not the policy of the British Government. In 1853, Earl Grey reported that the settler perspective on religion had been internalised in British foreign policy, and that if the “natives” remained “uncivilised and unimproved, adhering to the barbarous customs of their ancestors they would prove an

intolerable nuisance to European Settlers". Grey's remarks repeated the basic principles that the settlers held, that found Xhosa beliefs and practices both degenerate and dangerous on a contested frontier (Chichester 1996, 102).

While Bertha did not threaten her labourers physically, she was in a position of authority that imbued her with the power to dismiss and otherwise control the behaviour of her staff. This authority she exercised, apparently with scant consideration for the future of her employees, as is witnessed by the frequent dismissal of the white governesses and black catechists in her employ who had annoyed her for some, at times irrational, at times accountable, reason.

Before leaving for Europe, Bertha held regular religious services and Sunday School classes at Bonnefoi. These were apparently so well attended that she needed the help of a catechist. Several possible assistants were employed, but were found lacking in some way and they did not stay long. The cottage at Bonnefoi, which was used to house these services, proved to be too small. Much later, in 1929 Edith lived there after her return from England (Harmsen 1980, 147).

In 1918 Bertha built a church on the Lowveld farm, where people flocked to the services. Harmsen (1980, 43) records Bertha's delight at the large number of the congregation. The large wooden cross that Bertha erected there, apparently served as a landmark in the district for many years. Bishop Michael Furse consecrated the church. Bertha catered for a "proper" tea, delighting in his official robes and the pomp and grandeur of the spectacle. Harmsen (1980, 44) suggests that Bertha was aware of her preference for spectacle rather than introspection and that she frequently acknowledged her failure to understand scriptural teaching. In spite of her disillusionment with the church, Bertha remained involved in church affairs.

In a letter to Edith, Bertha reveals that while attending these communal church services, she would on occasion ask for a "quiet service just for ourselves" (Harmsen 1980, 44). She also refers to the black men present at other services as "boys" (TAG undated letter no 112).

Only in 1930 did Bertha manage to build a chapel at Bonnefoi on the farm Riverlands. It was converted from the original Bonnefoi store and was known as Saint Francis in the Veld. The church was decorated economically, using found objects and local materials, and depicted some of the many animals found in the area. The building was still in use when Harmsen wrote Women of Bonnefoi, although in a somewhat dilapidated state (Harmsen 1980, 158).

In the early 1930s Bertha's dream to build a proper church was realised when she was given, at her request, free reign in the building of a church for the Anglican community in Carolina, namely the Church of the Resurrection. Previously the only church in Carolina was Wesleyan. Details of its construction are available (TAG archives), but it was clearly a major project for Bertha. She went to endless trouble in its conception and in its construction, participating in provision of materials, decoration and manual labour (Harmsen 1980, 163). This fact is somewhat overshadowed by the fact that it was primarily for the use of the white farming community.

The local community contributed to the funds (notably Bury's generous contribution), with Bertha as a tireless fundraiser, clerk of works and architect. Curiously the building is based on a series of inter-connected rondavel shapes similar to the dwellings of many Africans. Despite this, it is largely based on the Eurocentric notion typical of most Christian churches, where the focus is on the east apsidal end. It has apparently been turned into a restaurant (pers com LEH 2001). The Bishop of Johannesburg consecrated this church on the 17<sup>th</sup> of April, 1932. Rev. A. Walls, a Wesleyan minister of the Ermelo district and in whose church the Anglicans had worshipped before now, wrote on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of April, 1932 that the service had been very well attended by many denominations and by the merely curious. He hoped that the church would "... achieve its purpose in the *Dorp* [village] and that it would be a visible conscience in the community" (Harmsen 1980, 165). Perhaps this church was also a visible reminder to Bertha of her connectedness to the Anglican faith.

Apart from Bertha's letters, where she is often harsh in her description of blacks, it is difficult to present a balanced view of her perceptions of black people. However, this research has led to the discovery of two paintings of black people by Bertha, possibly the

family of workers on the farm. This might give another interpretation of her professed views. The one depicts an old woman, seated on the dust floor in the doorway to a hut, the other a child on the grass.

Cherryl Walker (1990) in her chapter on Gender and the development of the migrant labour system c. 1850-1930, states that the imposition of colonial rule on a diversity of cultures in South Africa effectively doubly discriminated against black women and reduced their status to that of children. Both black and white patriarchy was unified in its desire for proprietorship over female sexuality. This shared concept of black women's inferiority and domesticity altered the gender ideology of white South Africa (Walker 1990, 192). Linda Nochlin (1989, 8) in Women Art and Power suggests that discrimination against black women in a first world situation was enforced by the patriarchal discourses empowered to do so, and by the women's tacit submission to it. This appears to be true in South Africa. The migration of black women to urban centres grew in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century despite severe discrimination practised against them. This may indicate the severity of their dissatisfaction with the situation at home. Unlike their Victorian counterparts, there were no conventions or taboos enforcing black women to remain in the impoverished rural areas (Walker 1990).

With this in mind, Bertha's rendering of black women in paint may be relevant here. Not a proclaimed portrait or figure painter, the technical ineptitude of these works is not of consequence here. Bertha acknowledged her lack of skill in life drawing in a letter to Ruth saying: "I feel I cannot help a great deal as I have never painted from the life." (TAG letter no 2 dated 1917) This may be so, but Bertha's sketches of children on the farm (Figs.128-130) that are owned by Everard Haden, and her assistance with Edith's school banner (Fig. 48) would suggest that she was quite capable of drawing from life. Perhaps these paintings were done from sketches on site or from photographs, and completed at home. It seems unlikely that Bertha would have had the time to paint them *in situ*.

In the fairly large painting entitled African woman seated in a kraal (nd) (Fig.124), the old woman is seated below eye level, indicating in her gesture and lack of eye contact, a position of servitude. The coarseness of her features and limbs show none of Bertha's ability to



capture a likeness, as seen in her miniatures of Ruth and Edith (Figs.34, 35). While lack of eye contact with the viewer may suggest servitude, it is a known custom of black people as a sign of respect. The woman's headdress and attire is colourfully "traditional" while indicating her impoverished status, and suggests Bertha's awareness of her "otherness". This position in which the older woman is found, while common in itself, must have been foreign to Bertha's concept of respectable Victorian femininity.

The hut against which she leans serves as a context for this woman. This and her thin-lipped mouth and her quiet, inactive pose, indicates her position as that of an old woman. Young women were expected to have been gainfully employed in manual domestic work such as tilling fields during daylight hours. Older women were often left in charge of the children while their mothers were employed. Chichester's research reveals that when it was suggested by well-meaning Christian missionaries that (black) men should work in the fields and not women, the women in the audience roared with laughter at the very thought (Chichester 1996, 196).

Black and white women were subjected to similar patriarchal discourses that encouraged women to be nurturers and home-keepers rather than becoming wage earners. Although the date of this painting has not been established, it may be important to note that with increased urbanisation, black women became the new centre of the household. A more severe form of patriarchy that was in control of the state not the family imposed a more severe form of legal disabilities on black women (Walker 1990, 196). Division of labour in the black culture was probably foreign to Bertha's perceptions of what was appropriate for women in her employ.

Bertha's painting of this woman suggests a certain malaise in the woman's apparent dejection and lowly status. The background of the hut is sparsely furnished with a grass mat, a closed door beyond suggesting closure and also, perhaps, of being denied access to that which lies beyond. Despite the bright colour, there is little to suggest anything but a casual, arguably indifferent glance, depicting this old black woman not as an individual, but as an object of curiosity.

In a recent survey of land demand in South Africa (1996) it was discovered that women outnumber men almost universally in the rural settlements surveyed and that men desire almost six times as much land for their households than women. Although traditionally both men and women work the land, it is women who generally till the fields and participate in the most strenuous labour, while the men are responsible for the loading and cartage of farmed goods (Marcus, Eales, Wildschut 1996, 20, 21). This practice was common on settler farms in terms of work distribution, and serves to highlight the onerous tasks that were the plight of most black women during Bertha's lifetime.

It is noticeable that, although they are obviously linked, Bertha's interest is in the black woman's social position rather than her sex. Unlike previous (mis) representations of black women, for example the depictions of Saartjie Baartman, where the artist emphasised gender and sexual differences, Bertha has chosen to clothe her in colourful rags. This may have stemmed from a sense of modesty or respect on Bertha's part or was simply what the woman had been wearing, but in doing so Bertha has imbued the black woman with some dignity and status of age. Unlike the idealised portraits of her sister and children, this woman has not been romanticised; Bertha's astuteness here has not been blinded by convention.

In the painting entitled African baby in yellow grass (nd) (Fig. 125) a small black child is seated on a bit of cloth on the grass. Unlike the painting of the old woman, this work suggests an innocence and optimism. The surrounding grass, although probably uncomfortably prickly, is tinged with a golden light. The child looks directly at the viewer with an innocent, unknowing expression. It is clothed in a white (suggesting innocence, purity) smock (an item of clothing introduced by the settlers, not traditional attire), and plays with a string of white (perhaps African) beads. Perhaps the beads could be likened to a Catholic rosary. Traditionally, children would not be clothed but this "barbarous nudity", it is suggested, was an indication of the "very lowest grade of savage life" and so undesirable in the environs of a Victorian domestic household. R. Godlonton, editor of the *Graham's Town Journal*, and spokesman for the settlers, made these remarks around 1885.

Beside the child on the grass is a small canister, suggesting the influence of white settlers.

Prior to colonisation, and subsequent to it, coiled clay pots were used to carry or contain liquid. This canister, no doubt, contained some form of nourishing liquid; perhaps the holy water to which Bertha so often seems to be in need of to save her thirsting soul? (TAG undated letter no 172 where Bertha says: "I often fear that my poor seedling soul will wilt and die, it gets so poorly watered.") Again, the child is viewed from above, suggesting superiority of the viewer, and the upward glance of the child suggesting the possibility of its redemption by looking up towards the "true light of salvation" (arguably that of the settlers, rather than Christ?).

On the few occasions when Bertha included figures in her landscapes (against Edith's advice, it would appear) they are usually herd-boys, (Spring, eastern Transvaal (nd) (Fig.54), Pale hillside (nd, c. 1924) (Fig.47) and Mid-Winter on the Komati (1910) (Fig.39). They are engaged in some way with the land, arguably "her" land, and are therefore no more significant in themselves than the trees or rocks that she used to indicate scale. In her book The Old Chief Mshlanga, the author Doris Lessing wrote about the prevalent racist attitudes of the Rhodesian farmers as seen through the eyes of a child. Her opinions seem relevant in this context and reveal perhaps the shared convictions of many settler farmers in southern Africa. Lessing wrote:

The black people on the farms were as remote as the trees and the rocks. They were an amorphous black mass, mingling and thinning and massing like tadpoles, faceless, who existed merely to serve, to say 'Yes Baas', take their money and go. They changed season by season, moving from one farm to the next, according to their outlandish needs, which one did not have to understand, coming from perhaps hundreds of miles north or east, passing on after a few months-where? Perhaps even as far away as the fabled gold-mines of Johannesburg, where the pay was so much better than the few shillings a month and the double handful of mealie meal twice a day which they earned in that part of Africa (Lessing in Gardener 1981, 60).

Conversely, Bertha's figures could suggest a certain domesticity. Their isolation in the magnificent landscape could also convey a sense of humanity's vulnerability in the face of God's creation. Bertha expressed this in a letter saying:

Terrible old Africa. What a midge man seems in this fierce setting... An overwhelming silence broods over this world when one sits alone. I like to sit alone for a few minutes but I could not bear it for long. Such an unfettered setting should produce calm but alas! Alas for fretful Birdie [a nickname for herself]. Worse than any dung beetle I be. (TAG undated letter no 182).

Likewise, other suggestions of domestic dwellings by both Bertha and Edith in South Africa are invariably African (beehive) huts as seen in Dawn on the Komati (c.1936/7) (Fig.116). Smoke spirals upwards indicating habitation. This painting, one of her last, is perhaps one of the few where she unwittingly acknowledges the right of the African's presence. While pictorially speaking the huts detract from rather than add to the composition, their inclusion seems quite "natural" and become an integral part of this expansive landscape. They are an (albeit tamed) expression of indigenous habitation. Neither threatening nor excluded, their presence is recorded. After Bertha's supreme irritation with and antagonism towards the labourers for their perceived slovenliness, ignorance and laziness, she seems to have resigned herself to their sharing of "her" land.

Arguably, Bertha's inclusion of symbols of their presence is partially as a result of her underlying Victorian need for a narrative element in her work. In these, she transforms the view from an unmanageable grandiose vision to the simply picturesque, with the addition of some trite or superfluous human figure. However, from another point of view it may suggest that her incessant need to punctuate her work with the inclusion of Africans is neither humanitarian nor impersonal, but a mark of her acknowledgement of their presence. It may be pertinent to point out that (based on the works available to this research) the inclusion of an entire kraal or settlement, as opposed to an isolated, perhaps decorative figure, appears in her work only after her return from Europe, as for example in Dawn on the Komati (c 1936/37) (Fig.116).

Likewise, Bertha's frequent depiction of the watercourses, which she helped build, is perhaps an attempt to secure her own position on the land, as are the names of the farms that they owned. For example: The new furrow (nd. but first exhibited 1931) (Fig.112), the Lekkerdraai and Skurweberg series, and Charlie's rocks, Skurweberg (nd) (Fig.61). Bertha is known to have insisted that her work, Looking towards Swaziland (1920/21), also known



as Opal valley, be catalogued as Opal valley, looking towards Swaziland (Fig. 70) at the Royal Academy, London in 1923, the Salon in Paris (1924) and the Imperial Art Exhibitions in order to “locate” the work (Harmsen 1980, 85). This suggests her desire to locate her work and herself in the South African context.

Opal valley (c 1920/21) (Fig. 70), one of Bertha’s most technically competent and adventurous paintings of this period, was hung alongside a work by Laura Knight at the Royal Academy in 1923 (Harmsen 1980, 85). Knight (1877-1970) an acclaimed British painter who worked in a loosely impressionistic, possibly Post-Impressionistic style, was made Dame of the British Empire in 1929 and became a Royal Academician in 1936 (McConkey 1995, 144). Knight’s largely figurative painting creates an impressionistic idyll of remote seaside village scenes or subjects from the theatre or circus. Bertha’s landscapes, devoid of figures, reliant on colour and less on a narrative, identifiable subject, appeals to different sensibilities altogether; those that were arguably less popular during Victorian times. Understandably, therefore, Knight’s work received critical acclaim. Bertha’s work is no less worthy, but different, and her position in the history of South African art still remains to be firmly established.

Bertha, unlike Pierneef, for example (but common to Ruth, Rosamund and to a lesser extent, Edith), tended to paint from a high vantage point. This suggests a more subjective view, perhaps a greater vulnerability implied by the lack of what Harmsen calls the “protective shelter of vertical trees” common in Pierneef’s work (Harmsen 1980 175). Bertha’s paintings are often made from a rather precarious position. She would situate herself against a steep slope, with a precipitous drop between her and the distant hills, her work therefore sometimes appearing to have a bird’s eye view. Take for example, Asbestos hills (c 1910) (Fig. 44), Rock and thunderheads (nd) (Fig. 65), Baboon valley (nd) (Fig. 67), Land of Luthany (nd) (Fig. 68) Looking towards Swaziland (1920/21) (Fig. 70), Lekkerdraai 1 (Fig. 115) and Lekkerdraai 2 (Fig. 117) (both undated) and Dawn on the Komati 1936/37 (Fig. 116). This research suggests that her selection of such precarious viewpoints seems to underline and acknowledge her own feelings of insecurity in the face of “terrible old Africa” (TAG undated letter no 182). This position also seems to have been more successful pictorially in



her work produced in South Africa. The need to distance herself from the landscape suggests also that she was aware that a “broader view” was needed that would encompass all that she could “see”. This distancing of self is rarely seen in her paintings done in Europe. The English landscapes of 1924, the Chantilly Woods of 1925 (Figs.82-84), the Normandy series of 1925 (Figs. 91, 92) and Delville Wood series of 1926 (Figs.103-110), for example, are with few exceptions firmly grounded and the viewpoint is usually much lower.

Harmesen points out that unlike Pierneef, Bertha used emotive rather than decorative colour. While both artists’ paintings appear naturalistic despite their at times unrealistic colour, Bertha’s colours appear to be far less intellectualised and more emotional. Pierneef’s apparently impassive, carefully considered compositions contrast with Bertha’s passionate and spontaneous application of paint.

This does not mean to suggest that Bertha’s work was conceived spontaneously. Her sketchbooks contain examples of preliminary sketches that may have been developed into finished works. However, it has been observed from incomplete paintings that after selecting a suitable composition, Bertha would use charcoal (or when she may have felt more confident, dark paint) to indicate roughly the outlines on a previously primed canvas or board (sometimes white, sometimes with an ochre or brownish imprimatura), then work directly from nature using thin oil washes at first, and then move onto thicker and textured paint application. This method is visible in her unfinished work entitled Sunlit hill and cliff (c 1916) (Fig.123) where thin washes of paint were sensitively applied and the loose brush marks remained as yet uncluttered by layers of over-painting. The method of working all over the canvas was advocated in turn of the century *plein-air* British painting schools such as those at St Ives and at Herkomer’s school in Bushey. This was different to the more academic approach that insisted upon careful preparatory sketches with the emphasis on a focal point, and on completing individual areas after having established the composition and careful modulation of tonal areas (McConkey 1995,20). Bertha’s habit of working until she was exhausted is evident in this letter that suggests that she would paint until her sense of discretion was lost, or numbed:

Today I worked so hard and so late that I could not take a final look to see what I had done... I am almost too tired to write even this note for I've been struggling with that picture from dawn to dusk, literally, and that in the face of great odds sometimes drenching rain and always wind enough to shave one's eyelashes off and very low temperatures all day... I am now in such a bewildered state that I don't know bad from good (TAG undated letter no 79).

It was a perception among some late 19<sup>th</sup> century English landscape painters that art was somehow more authentic if it was conceived in uncomfortable surroundings (McConkey 1995, 27). Perhaps Bertha was aware of this attitude. She had enjoyed Herkomer's expeditions into the country, and Herkomer's school was well attended and highly thought of by many artists who seemed to adhere to his rigorous instructions about painting directly from nature in the remote areas of Cornwall and St Ives. McConkey (1995, 104, 182, 202) discusses individual artists such as John Arnesby Brown (1866-1955), Mabel Pride (1871-1934) and Algernon Talmage (1871-1934), who attended Herkomer's school in Bushey.

Hard work was considered to be an attribute in art and in life at that time. Bertha certainly complied. In the gospels that she tried to impart to the labourers on her farms, Christ instructs his disciples on the basic tenets of Christianity. He advocates poverty over wealth, reaping heavenly reward after misery on earth, of loving one's neighbour and one's enemy, of not being judgemental but forgiving, and of building upon the strong foundation of his teachings (Luke 6:12-46). Bertha questioned Christian doctrines, but apparently these queries were often met with ignorance. In a letter to Edith Bertha complained:

Why did our Lord use earth and spittal [sic] to open the eyes of a man born blind? Why is a reward offered to those who keep the 5<sup>th</sup> commandment? And for no other? Mr Bell said such questions as the first didn't interest him, he never tried to read meanings like that into the Bible. I asked him how he 'searched' to find but he answered nothing (TAG undated letter no 76).

A basic tenet of Christianity is that all men have souls. Bertha's letter of despair as a result of her failure to convince the blacks of Christ's existence suggests her complete disavowal of this idea. In a long and plaintive letter to Edith she described the "natives" as being "wasted material", "dirty degraded lazy wholly unspiritual", and that she did not believe that they had souls (TAG undated letter 172).

This letter suggests that Bertha's relationship with black people was severed. There has been little evidence to suggest that her attitude to blacks changed significantly. Bertha's great-granddaughter, Nichola Leigh, described her grandmother Ruth as being harsh towards their servants. Leigh said:

She [Ruth] made me angry but I always wanted her approval and loved her. She could be severe, critical and disapproving especially if people didn't match her exact standards or love animals. She was uncompromising and stubborn and a born perfectionist. She applied her exacting standards to herself and others and would only accept the best when it came to a job whether it was painting, looking after animals, breeding horses or instructing the unfortunate servants. I remember her as intolerant of mistakes and forever blaming the servants for anything that went wrong. I always felt great empathy for the servants and was distraught, hurt and filled with rage at her inexcusable treatment of them. It would not be unfair to say she was often a tyrant (Leigh 2000, 34).

It is possible that Ruth may have adopted some of Bertha's attitude. As Bertha's favoured child, Ruth's perceptions and attitudes to servants may have been acquired from her mother.

Segregation between races was actively encouraged by the apartheid policies in South Africa and encouraged distance between races, largely for economic reasons. This was achieved with remarkable economic success and what appears to have been the tacit approval of the Christian church, until prior to the government's capitulation in 1994. Archbishop Desmond Tutu, leader of the Anglican Church in South Africa in 1986, finally convinced the Anglican Church to actively resist apartheid policies, which before the 1950s it had not challenged (Saunders 1994, 242). Had Bertha's quest for greater illumination of Christian doctrine by more informed or enlightened sources been rewarded, her attitude to race and class issues may have been different.

## **CHAPTER 5: Evaluating the influences of some discourses from Victorian to the early South African Art Societies**

Bertha left England in 1902 to settle in South Africa as a mature woman of twenty-nine, her formative years having been spent in Victorian England. Most of her adult life was spent in South Africa although the sojourn in Europe between 1922 and 1926 shows significant influence on her work. Historical contextualising may therefore be helpful to a better understanding of Bertha's approach to her work. There is limited information available about her early years other than the dates of her whereabouts and training as discussed in Chapter 1.

In the absence of more detailed, personal information, it may be especially pertinent to examine the ideologies that prevailed in England at this time, and to compare these with any anecdotal evidence provided in her letters or from Harmsen's research. Born in the middle of Queen Victoria's reign (1837-1901) Bertha may well have been affected by certain Victorian value systems. Pertinent to this research is the role of women in the art world in Victorian times and that of the social, historical and moral discourses which formed Bertha's concept of self.

On arrival in South Africa, a family friend, Archdeacon Stevenson, described Bertha as being "individual and original" and was "given to doing and saying outrageous things". He said that her "imagination ran riot" whereas Edith was never "temperamental", was more "disciplined", and as a result "less creative" than Bertha but more "real and authentic" (Harmsen 1980, 4). His opinion, as expressed in Harmsen (1980), reflects his perception of the two women that was in line with the prevailing Victorian concepts of womanhood, perhaps revealing a covert preference for Bertha's less conventional attitude. The approval expressed suggests the lingering romantic notion of "artist as genius", where unconventionality was expected.

Bertha's more rigorously moral associates may certainly have perceived her as rather unconventional, but despite her private debates about matters concerning contemporary social codes, she appears to have retained a sense of moral propriety and did not disclose publicly the antipathy she may have felt at times. The companionship of her sister Edith was



of foremost importance in her life. Edith became not only a confidant but also a role model. Edith's temperament seemed suited to this role, as guide and confessor to her more emotional and often insecure sister.

Married to Charles, Bertha chose to live a secluded life on the farm. Despite frequent absences from the farm, she preferred this way of life. Charles, of whom little is known, was much older than her. He seems to have been a correct and particular man, and appears to have loved his children and provided for them financially. Bertha and Charles's relationship was complex and did not conform to convention. That Bertha was fond of him initially is clear, but soon she became critical of him. The reasons for this change in attitude are unclear. Their frequent separation must have compounded any problems that may have arisen. Bertha was very fond of making quick and perhaps rash decisions to remove herself from problems that presented themselves. It may be pertinent to point out that her mother's flight from her father may have set some unconscious precedent in these matters.

Valuing privacy above all, Bertha's public appearances were few and appear to have been marred by a self-conscious fear of being a public spectacle. Her anonymity was not conducive to public success, neither was her predisposition to privacy.

A well-intentioned philanthropist, Bertha strove to educate and convert with missionary zeal, the black labourers on her farms, even including two black boys on their visit to England to further their education. That these attempts failed is of less significance here, but is discussed in Chapter 4.

Campbell Orr (1995, 1) suggests that the concept of women in Victorian England has traditionally been encumbered by notions of moral rectitude and suppressed sexuality. Research has shown that there are wide discrepancies between what values could be described as "essentially" Victorian. The role of women was a hotly debated issue at that time and many different types of women were associated with the art world. Some women consciously aligned themselves to feminist strategies while others, notably the queen, opposed discussion of women's rights (Campbell Orr 1995, 1). Women were able in various



ways to negotiate the terms that restricted rather than prevented them from acting in the public sphere. As Campbell Orr suggests, it is necessary to direct one's attention to what it was about their educational backgrounds or personal disposition that made negotiation possible (Campbell Orr 1995, 9).

Bertha was known to be argumentative; she and Edith reportedly engaged in lively debate (Harmsen 1980, 4) and frequently questioned Christian doctrines. In some instances Bertha questioned the validity of contemporary moral codes. There is little evidence of her questioning the then generally accepted ideology of racially based social Darwinism. That Bertha chose to study art is indicative of the late Victorian predisposition towards the cultivation of art and artists, assisted largely by the tireless work of working-class female suffragists who endeavoured, among other issues, to make artistic training more readily available to women from all social classes. The term Feminism was not used in England before 1895, but since Mary Wollstonecraft's Vindication of the Rights of Women in 1792, this was an identifiable discourse. Women's public participation was seen in the later 19<sup>th</sup> century (Cherry in Campbell Orr, 49, 56).

Victoria's long and generally peaceful reign saw an expanded population and industry, new middle-class prosperity and increased self-confidence. Treuherz (1993) suggests this provided an atmosphere in which the arts, especially painting, could flourish. Artistic production was encouraged and thousands of people flocked to national art exhibitions where sales generated significant income for the fledgling national art institutions and where the wealthy amassed significant collections. Knighthoods and baronetcies were bestowed on artists on a basis of merit and/or patronage of the arts, and from this elevated position they were able to mix with aristocracy on equal terms. An education in art must have been an appealing option to Bertha.

Treuherz (1993) suggests that many Victorians believed they were living in a time of flowering creativity and went so far as to equate the work of contemporary English artists such as Millais (1829-1896), Watts (1817-1904) and Leighton (1830-1896) with that of Titian, Michelangelo and Raphael. Not all were of the same opinion. The period was split

between established and progressive taste in art and was responsible for the creation of the modern idea of the avant-garde. Generally speaking, innovation was rejected by the Academy. Many Victorian painters preferred the use of a visual language that was understood and “read” by groups from widely different social and educated backgrounds. Bertha’s early paintings appear to ascribe to this generally held view. This kind of art provided popular entertainment and nurtured cultural (and moral) improvement. To counter this pervasive attitude, alternative exhibition spaces and new patrons were sought by an increasing number of new art societies (Treuhertz 1993, 6, 7).

In Victorian England patriarchy was an entrenched ideology supported by popular social values in the form of moral and ideological “common sense”, which pervaded all but the poorest classes of society where poverty precluded the niceties associated with class distinctions. Initially, the strict division of the sexes into the male/public and female/private spheres largely precluded women from public life, until the concept of what constituted the public sphere was enlarged when the boundaries between aristocracy, nobility and the upper classes entrenched in the previous century became increasingly blurred (Digby in Campbell Orr 1995, 4, 5). Women’s participation in this development is significant.

Campbell Orr (1995) reveals that by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the term public sphere suggested being within the established political system of parliamentary monarchy and the private as anything outside of this. Before the clarification of the party political system, the middle class used pressure group policies that were largely dependent on women’s participation. They aimed to reform the civil service, the army and for the removal of civil disabilities for non-Anglicans. Efforts to advance the status of women were achieved by enlarging the public sphere to previously excluded groups. Women were always a part of this enlarging process and many had feminist sympathies. These groups were differentiated by regional and/or religious association, and consisted of many varying social groups and income levels. It is noteworthy that Bertha made some attempts to establish herself in the art world when she tried to arrange for an art school in Cape Town in 1921/2, but this did not materialise.

Victorian moralists were heirs of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century's Evangelical Revival and stern moralising tenets in which women were ascribed a sphere of influence in the private domain while being excluded from public office. Women were seen as guardians of the moral development and the nurturing of children. Feminine virtues of sympathy and moral insight enabled women to create a sanctuary separate from the influences of the outside world. The increasingly affluent commercial middle-classes were able to emulate the professional and upper middle-classes' custom of keeping their wives and daughters in leisure. Self-indulgence and frivolity was not tolerated, however, and women were encouraged to educate their young children at home and to be involved in charitable duties in the neighbourhood (Campbell Orr 1995, 3). Charitable work was a middle-class ideal that was also increasingly evident among the aristocracy. This was probably as a response to the dissolute manners associated with the preceding Regency period and typical of the Victorian sense of public duty. Bertha's desire to educate and care for the labourers on her farms may have stemmed from similar notions.

Affluent entrepreneurs also upheld the ideal of a separate public and private domain. Aspiring to the nobility's disapproval of women earning money in public, they ensured that their wives and unmarried daughters were instead fruitfully engaged in domestic activities and sufficiently proficient in the arts to be entertaining in polite company (Campbell Orr 1995, 7). As an affluent white woman in South Africa, Bertha encouraged her children to be accomplished in the arts, suggesting perhaps her alignment with the upper classes in England.

This idea of separate public and private spheres was an entrenched ideology, but one which was nevertheless breached by women from various economic spheres. There were those who did so in a flagrantly confrontational manner (and were dubbed "morally insane"), and those who did so more tactfully. Significantly Bertha apparently chose to avoid the more "flagrantly confrontational" manner in her lifestyle, and for the most part, in her art. The more tactful exploited the Victorian inconsistencies of attitude in such "troublesome" areas, for example, the sphere in which the churches operated (Campbell Orr 1995, 5). Later, high society's ambivalence about the Bohemian influence also affected the widening of the parameters of this notion (Campbell Orr 1995, 25).

The term “public sphere” also refers to the Victorian concept of high society, where families of noble birth (initially at least, and later professionals) had the right of introduction to the reigning monarch. These men (the professions excluded most women) and their families led “public” lives. This included the gentry, members in service to the Royal household (women being a notable exception here as “ladies in waiting”), officers of the government, those who had seats in the House of Lords, the Army, Navy, Church, and Judiciary. Public events and ceremonies included the presence of their wives (who were allowed to sit in the galleries during official ceremonies) and daughters, for example at “coming out” ceremonies that acted as marriage markets for unmarried daughters. A key event in the London season was the opening of the Royal Academy Summer Show that was by invitation only. The public was later admitted for a small fee. Women from these circles were expected to be accomplished in the arts (watercolours especially, but also music) but their social position precluded their working professionally (Campbell Orr 1995, 10).

The parameters defining the public sphere were criticised from both within the established system and from without. The most radical critique came from Religious Dissenters and philosophical anarchists. Aristocratic culture, and their perception of the insidious role played by women in its constitution, was criticised by some. The egalitarian feminist Mary Wollstonecraft had called for reforms in women’s behaviour in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. These struggles (and others) hoped to bring about a change in the character of the *ancien regime* and create a morally serious, meritocratic society to replace the aristocratic management and subservience to aristocratic patronage (Campbell Orr 1994, 8). The removal of some restrictions on Religious Dissenters (1828-1829) and the public enfranchisement of the Victorian middle-class in 1832 by the Parliamentary Reform Act, served to enlarge and remodel the definition of what constituted the public sphere.

Anne Digby (in Campbell Orr, 1994) describes the discrepancy between the public and private spheres as a social borderland with flexible parameters where women redefined public issues as essentially women’s issues, arguing that the public sphere was in need of more feminine values. The concept of what constituted a public sphere, she suggests, had



evolved from an 18<sup>th</sup> century concept of those who were involved with court culture and the Enlightenment, where a freer press, a wider reading public and the intellectual scrutiny of government ensured the development of a constitutional monarchy and parliamentary system (Campbell Orr 1995, 7).

The enlargement of the public sphere, which is similar to Digby's borderland, was not fixed but a part of the development of a greater democracy in government. While men were indisputably at the forefront, women's participation on an informal level had been constant even during the *ancien regime*. By the end of Victoria's reign, this process had produced nationally and locally the great political and legal institutions of the public spheres in Victorian Britain. Alongside this, learned societies and regulatory bodies were established for old and new professions, with women increasingly visible within some of these institutions (Campbell Orr 1995, 9-10).

Enlightened rulers tolerated the free press, they opened access to court-based theatre and opera, and encouraged the development of commercial entertainment, secular and meritocratic education. The French Revolution accelerated this in many European monarchies as they hastened to emulate the French's more egalitarian approach by opening royal art collections to the public (Campbell Orr 1995, 7).

Victoria played an important role in the promotion of the arts by commissioning local artists such as Hayter (1792-1871) and the German artist Winterhalter (1806-1873) for official portraits. The public's preference for the work of Constable (1776-1837), Landseer (1803-1873) and Turner (1775-1851), who were considered quintessentially Victorian, prevailed, and no dramatic artistic changes were seen from the preceding Romantic period (Treuhertz 1993, 9). It is interesting to note that Victoria purchased three paintings Roll Call (1874), Balaclava (1876) and The Return from Inkerman (1877) by Elizabeth Thompson (later Lady Butler). These paintings depicted in a popular social realist style the experience of the ordinary British soldier in the aftermath of battle during the Crimean War (c1854). Unlike contemporary male artists, she chose not to portray war as heroic (Treuhertz 1988, 179). Victoria's purchase of Ramsgate sands (1854) by Frith (1819-1909) helped to confer



acceptance on subjects taken from modern life and broaden the parameters of contemporary taste (Campbell Orr 1995, 20). The royal couple had set an unprecedented and admirable example by acquiring work from living artists (Treuhertz 1993, 48).

Victoria's taste in art seems to have been for formal portraits, images which popularised domestic bliss with a strong emphasis on narrative detail, works which were considered professional, had a good likeness, were flattering, expensive-looking, highly-coloured and finished. Treuhertz (1993) suggests that artists at that time mirrored the prevailing Whig ethics of progress towards a constitutional monarchy and the defence of parliamentary liberties. This included national pride, moral and political exemplars for the "modern" age, romantic heroes and heroines and a nostalgia for a glamorous past (Treuhertz 1993, 24).

Central to the Victorian art world was the Royal Academy, founded in 1768, where young artists were trained at its own schools and which organised annual public exhibitions. Angelica Kauffman (1741-1807) and Mary Moser (1744-1819) were founder members of the Academy, but it was only in 1860 that Laura Herford (active 1859 - d.1871) was inadvertently admitted, the Academy having mistaken her signature for that of a male. Even so, the Academy Schools banned women again from 1864 to 1867 and women were not allowed to become members until 1881, although in the meantime other art schools, notably the Slade (founded 1871) had opened its doors to women students, although they were strictly segregated from men (Treuhertz 1993, 128 and Sellars 1988,1). For over thirty years, female students at the Academy were allowed to draw from casts and paint from draped or clothed models. In 1893 they were first allowed a partially draped model, the life class being reserved for men only (Sellars 1988, 1). It was in this year that Bertha registered at the Slade (Harmsen 1980, 9).

The first of the Royal Academy exhibitions was held in 1769 and became an important event in the art calendar. Previously commissions from wealthy patrons were the only way that artists could gain recognition or employment and relied on the chance social introduction of the two parties. Now artists had freer reign in their choice of subject matter and patrons were able to view work by a range of different artists. The public flocked to these exhibitions in

unprecedented numbers (Treuhertz 1988, 10-11). The principal founder and first president of the Academy, Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792) had sought to establish the intellectual status of painting as a liberal art, promoting the superior values of "history painting" to landscape, portrait or genre painting, all of which dealt with the momentary and the particular. History painting never really caught on in Britain because the paintings were in general too large for most houses, so reducing the demand (Treuhertz 1988, 11).

By 1837, the date of Victoria's enthronement, public exhibitions were common in England, as an increasing number of provincial centres began to emulate London. Exhibitions were held by a number of newly founded societies such as the British Institution (founded 1805), the Society of Arts (founded 1824), the Old Water Colour Society (founded 1805) and the New Water Colour Society (founded 1831) (Treuhertz 1993, 10).

During Victoria's reign, the decoration of the newly rebuilt Houses of Parliament was one of the most expensive episodes in the government's patronage of the arts. The architects Barry (1795-1869) and Pugin (1812-1852) completed this in 1840, and the decorators were briefed to create mural designs similar to French (Versailles) and German (Munich) examples. The neo-Gothic building and the fresco murals depicting historical and allegorical subjects serve as a reminder of the nostalgia for pre-industrial England that prevailed. Prime Minister Sir Robert Peel set up a Royal Commission to investigate whether the new building could be used to promote British art, and appointed Prince Albert to the position of chairman of this Royal Commission, with Charles Eastlake as secretary. Prince Albert became a leading supporter of State patronage and presided over the Westminster murals and organised the Great Exhibition of 1851, among others. The royal couple thereby set a public example for patronage of the arts (Treuhertz 1993, 42-48).

In 1837, thirteen years after it was inaugurated, the National Gallery was still very modest in scope. During Victoria's reign, several national art museums were expanded and she was a consistent supporter of the Royal Academy Summer Exhibitions, taking an active interest in the arts. Victoria opened the first of many great Industrial Exhibitions (Crystal Palace) in 1851 and again in 1854 and 1856. In 1856, work by Landseer (1802-1873) and Rosa Bonheur

(1822-1899) was exhibited. After much dispute as to its new building site, the National Gallery was erected at the cost of £160 000 and opened in 1868. Charles Eastlake (1793-1865) was its first director (Hubbard 1951, 1, 60). On the 17<sup>th</sup> of May, 1899, Victoria laid the foundation stone of the Victoria and Albert Museum, in commemoration of her husband. The South London Gallery was opened in 1890 and the Tate Gallery, under the auspices of the National Gallery, was opened in 1897. The Tate collection comprised work donated by Tate, and the artist Watts (1817-1904) which included paintings by Leighton, Clausen, Millet, McWhirter, Millais and Lucy Kemp-Welch. Leighton (1830-1896) and Alma-Tadema (1836-1912) were ennobled while Watts twice declined a baronetcy for his contribution to the arts (Hubbard 1951, 168).

Early Victorian taste and patronage appears to have been for recognisable subjects that embodied middle-class values of propriety, respect, hard work and the sanctity of family life, the innocence of children, obedience and charity. There was a general distrust of sensuality in art due to an Evangelical and Unitarian bias, and a suspicion of enjoyment of art for arts' sake that did not appear to have any moral or instructive purpose. Artists generally avoided impropriety in paintings and nudes were only deemed suitable in the depiction of fairies, classical mythology or history painting (Treuhertz 1993, 33, 34). This does not dismiss a covert interest in sensuality and sexuality, sometimes thinly veiled, in the above-mentioned themes.

Poverty, homelessness and unemployment were not popular in painting, as they were visible everywhere but not thought fitting subjects for art. Lady Eastlake, a writer on art, complained in 1863 that work was admired for middle class values such as truthfulness to subject and workmanship and that highly finished and meticulous work was regarded as value for money (Treuhertz 1993, 35).

The British Museum began with the national purchase of Sir Hans Sloane's collection, was augmented by the Duchess of Portland's collection and the 100 botanical illustrations by her friend Mary Delany (Campbell Orr 1995, 21-22). Most benefactresses came from Victorian high society. Some bequeathed or donated works or collections of art to national institutions

in an attempt to elevate their sagging social esteem for moral or social *faux pas*, or as upwardly mobile socialites who wished to establish themselves in high society (Campbell Orr 1995, 20). The monarch was also expected to play an historic role as patron to the arts (which Victoria and Albert did), but also to show by example their good taste. Victoria was a skilled water-colourist as were many previous and subsequent generations of Royal women, who set the example for ladies of the nobility and down the class ranks.

Victoria's relationship with Prince Albert and her children embodied the Victorian culture of respectability, much as Victoria's grandparents, George III and Queen Charlotte, had done, and instilled in her subjects similar aspirations (Campbell Orr 1995, 4). Successive royal families emulated their interest in and patronage of the arts (Hubbard 1951, 194).

Victoria's reign lasted 74 years, during which time a number of important social and economic changes took place. This was a period of flux and reflected the non-uniform social economy of cultural experiences. Of concern to this research is the role of women. Perhaps one of the most significant events in this regard was the revolutionary change in British Property Rights (1880s) that affected married women. New divorce and child custody laws were enacted and educational and work prospects for women were transformed (Campbell Orr 1995, 1).

However, despite the attempts of more liberally-minded sections of society, self-promotion, attention-seeking and ambition were pejorative attributes and emancipation was regarded as unnatural. Such gendered prescriptions may, for example, have influenced the fledgling poet Christina Rossetti's withdrawal from the new Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood movement as a result of her reluctance to have her poetry read aloud. Pride was seen as an unfeminine "fault" (Marsh in Campbell Orr 1995, 35, 36, 37). Marsh explains:

Their internalised sense of shame in regard to seeking public recognition derived from a still powerful belief that restricted them to the home except when decently dressed and veiled. Even when it was their work that was on display rather than their bodies, the sense of exposure to insult was similar and acted as a powerful deterrent (Marsh in Campbell Orr 1995, 36).



According to Marsh, genius was held to be frequently fatal to mental stability among both men and women, citing examples of Ruskin and Rossetti, but she adds that there was probably greater stress caused by cultural pressure on women regarding the “unnatural” and “unfeminine” pursuit of fame which caused women to retreat into the private sphere when confronted with negative critical opinion (Marsh in Campbell Orr 1995, 41). Bertha’s retreat to the private sphere after suffering negative criticism of her work seems to comply with Marsh’s notions.

However, there was the perception that artistic rewards were possible for women as for men. Despite cultural obstacles to ambition, artistic skill was encouraged as a mark of class status. By the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century the middle-class’s adoption of these aristocratic habits could be seen. The balance between artistic accomplishment and actual achievement was defined by a gendered interpretation of the term “accomplishment” when aligned with reference to sex. Women’s accomplishment was trivialised while men’s was valorised (Marsh in Campbell Orr 1995, 37).

The Victorian ideal of philanthropy, exemplified by Queen Victoria’s own actions, was an area where women had established significant networks, often as charitable organisations. It was here that many were able to make the transition between private and public spheres in campaigns against slavery, improved housing, meritocratic education and beautification of the dehumanised industrial landscape. For example, Octavia Hill, an ardent campaigner and financier of the first housing project, worked on housing management schemes, was a founder of the National Trust, and a teacher at Bodichon’s School for girls. Mary Gillies (writer) and her sister Margaret (illustrator) were two other women who campaigned against child labour (Campbell Orr 1995, 5). Likewise, Bertha’s desire to educate and reform the blacks in her employ suggests philanthropic ideals.

Some Victorian women were able successfully to resist their schooling in self-restraint because of a social background accustomed to criticism of the establishment (Campbell Orr 1995, 17). However, Bertha’s upbringing does not suggest that resistance to authority was in any way tolerated. Campbell Orr (1995, 17) suggests that by drawing on imaginary or



historical role models, women could gain strength from shared ideals with other women. It is uncertain whether Bertha held any other woman, real or fictional, apart from her sister Edith, in sufficiently high esteem to warrant them being considered role models. Travel or living away from the parental home in the companionship of other women became increasingly acceptable, and Bertha certainly availed herself of this opportunity when she travelled to the continent to study music. In the London streets, women were supposed to be as unobtrusive as possible in dress and demeanour, for fear of being mistaken for “public women” (prostitutes), especially in some districts. Bertha remarked on her daughter’s wearing of “breeches” in public and expressed her disregard for the opinion of the Boers who may have regarded this as “eccentric” (TAG letter no 170 dated 28.1.28)

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, two art institutions dominated the art scene - the Royal Academy founded in 1768 and the New English Art Club that was inaugurated in 1885 to counter the hegemony of the conservative and complacent Academy (Arnold 1987, 7 and Hubbard 1951, 133 offer two different dates: 1886/1885 respectively). Training at these institutions was conservative, with the emphasis on drawing, usually from live models or plaster reproductions of classical sculpture. Regarded by some as “young rebels” the artists Fred Brown (1851-1941, Henry Tonks (1862-1937) and Philip Wilson Steer (1860-1942) taught at the Slade, Sickert (1860-1942) joining soon after. Whistler (1834-1903) was always scornful of this club (Hubbard 1951, 94, 133, 176). William Orpen (1878-1931) and Augustus John (1878-1961) were award-winning students there, while Harold Gilman (1878-1919) and Spencer Gore (1878-1914) became progressive painters, as well as Mark Gertler (nd), Brett (1829-1882) and Carrington (nd). The latter two artists were women who dropped their first names (Arnold 1987, 7, Hubbard 1951, and Treuherz 1993).

It would appear that from 1870 onwards, unrelated events changed the character of Victorian painting. Academicians such as Leighton (1830-1896), Millais (1829-1896), and Alma-Tadema (1836-1912) dominated official exhibitions, and innovative artists appear to have been sidestepped or ignored by national art institutions. A widespread dissatisfaction with English art education and Royal Academy practises resulted in many art students travelling to Paris to study, their curiosity aroused by contemporary artists such as Monet, Camille

Pissarro, Sisley and Bastien-Lepage, who had all exhibited in London and were the cause of heated critical dispute. The younger generation of English artists were increasingly critical of the art of their forefathers, questioning both style and subject matter, and uncertain about the encroaching status of photography as fine art (McConkey 1995, 12). The French bohemian life, though spartan, appealed to students of art, and this bohemianism was later emulated in certain circles in England. It is significant that the perception that French painting was superior was based on Salon rather than Impressionist painting (McConkey 1995, 22, Treuherz 1993 and Hubbard 1951).

Victorian society rendered the artistic professions more prestigious and respectable by inventing the idea of artistic Bohemia, which stood outside the restrictive class categories. Campbell Orr suggests that women did succeed in feminising the arts professions to some degree, and that the growth of cultural provision, financed by public and private wealth, helped to integrate the arts more fully into Victorian society in a process which also provided more scope for women (Campbell Orr 1995, 25).

Issues of gender were integral to the establishment of the public and private spheres. The Earl of Shaftesbury, a leading 18<sup>th</sup> century theoretician, was concerned with the proper formation of artistic taste, and established models of masculinity and femininity appropriate to polite company. Angelica Kauffman and Mary Moser, as founder members of the Royal Academy, show that women were not initially automatically excluded from art institutions. That this became the rule is indicated by their complete exclusion until Laura Herford's (1831-1870) accidental acceptance into this institution in 1860. She had signed her name as L. Herford and it was presumed she was male (Campbell Orr 1995, 8). Hubbard (1951), remarking on the absence of women at art schools, pointedly says that the exclusion of women was customary rather than prohibited. Hubbard's patronising tone is revealed when he says: "And what of women students? They, poor dears, were handicapped by their physical charms. Early matrimony seriously depleted their ranks." He quotes from a report on the Female Government School of Art which stated: "To avoid these losses, plainer candidates were selected for training, but they, too, have obtained preference as wives to a perplexing extent" (Hubbard 1951, 6).

Although many women valued their friendships with women, some marriages provided examples of the Victorian companionate ideal. Campbell Orr gives examples of Lady Eastlake (a well-travelled and established author in her own right) and her husband Charles, Director of the National Gallery, who worked together as a joint enterprise. She was a benefactress to the Gallery when she left her personal collection to it on her death. Lady Charlotte Schreiber's porcelain collection was bequeathed to the British Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum. Her collection had been obtained through inheritance from her first husband. While Lady Schreiber's benefactions were considerable they were not unprecedented (Campbell Orr 1995, 22).

Widowhood, and the endowment of an art collection was an acceptably philanthropic way to commemorate a deceased spouse, while ensuring his/her public presence in perpetuity. During the 1880s, when laws on women's property rights were changed, widows were able to control their money and inheritance fully. This could mean an accession of wealth and undivided power to dispose of it (Campbell Orr 1995, 23). Previously money was safeguarded in trusts, as women were deemed unsuitably schooled in finances and the "ways of the world". Mary Combe, a sympathetic friend and supporter of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, bequeathed her collection of Pre-Raphaelite painting to a public museum. Similarly, Lord Lever named his gallery at Port Sunlight after his wife, although there is no evidence to suggest that she had any knowledge or involvement with the collection, but simply "inspired him" (Campbell Orr 1995, 22). In this way, both men and women moved between the public and private realms, often "inadvertently".

Just as young ladies from mid-century had been expected to have amateur artistic accomplishments, so now "well-to-do" middle-class girls were meant to be "arty". However, they still encountered a very masculine world if they aspired to professional status. The guilds and brotherhoods were often all-male or had homoerotic subtexts like C. R. Ashbee's Guild of Handicrafts, but in response women created all-female networks and relied on each other for support and friendship (Campbell Orr 1995, 18).

The Prattle sisters' eccentric, upper-class Bohemian lifestyle at Little Holland House was tolerated by London's high society, but regarded with some suspicion as it was frequented by artists and musicians. In this artistic neighbourhood, a mixture of various arts professionals - writers, actors and artists - were to be found, mixing in overlapping circles, linked to the underworld and Bohemian-minded members of high society. The utterly respectable did not frequent these "dens of iniquity", and young women were forbidden to venture near them unchaperoned. Romantic and commercial liaisons linked the sexes and class structures there. Arts professionals had since the 18<sup>th</sup> century tended to form their own sub-cultures where they existed in a borderland. Art as a career (for men and women) was still frowned upon by high society, and was regarded as a *petit bourgeois* trade. Although they mixed socially with theatre people, women were not encouraged to go on stage, at least until mid-century (Campbell Orr 1995, 24).

Campbell Orr discusses the careers of the Quaker Anna Mary Howitt and the Unitarian Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon, who were among the women artists who were also feminists. Both came from religious minorities and were, by definition, excluded from participating fully in the public sphere because only Anglicans could hold public office before 1829. Howitt's family was active in the anti-slavery movement and Bodichon's family was well known in reforming activism in the public sphere. Neither of these women was free from the hegemonic gender conditioning processes, which predominated Victorian society. Both had to find ways to negotiate and overcome the stifling conventions, which were designed to discourage women from making exhibitions of themselves (Campbell Orr 1995, 14).

This research suggests that Bertha's foster parents appear to have enforced conformity and obedience by, for example, locking Bertha in a coal cellar when she misbehaved (Harmsen 1980, 7). This punishment may well have resulted in Bertha's determination to be independent of figures of authority and also have instilled an ambivalent love and fear of open spaces or prolonged periods of solitude. Her dislike of publicity suggests a deep-seated self-consciousness and self-awareness that may also have stemmed from her childhood.

The working class's sense of respectability was underpinned by Victorian literature such as

Tennyson's The Princess (1847) and Coventry Patmore's poetic sequence The Angel in the House (1854-1863) and was expressed in art depicting the "respectable" versus the "fallen" woman, as discussed by Lynda Nead (1988). These helped to reinforce the constructions of Victorian femininity and contribute towards their ideological power (Campbell Orr 1995).

Bertha's perception of femininity seems generally to concur with these ideas. Her behaviour in the domestic sphere largely conformed to those that urged women to be self-denying and nurturant beings. Being a good mother, however mis-directed her actions may have been, was of great importance to her.

Women often participated in establishing informal art groups. Once they became established and institutionalised, women were restricted to amateur status or honorary membership because of their gender and the general perception that sustained professionalism was a male domain. However, informal networks were established among diverse cultural groupings in the middle-classes, where women were active in the grey areas (or "borderland") that defied clarification of public or private spheres. The public/private dichotomy was not as clear-cut as might be expected. Women were not entirely prevented from being part of the new enlarged public sphere, and their inclusion or negotiation of the parameters may usually be attributed to their own background or personal disposition (Campbell Orr 1995, 9). In 1857 the Society of Female Artists made visible those women artists who were making work which they wanted to show and sell, and thereafter women artists became a much-discussed issue in the growing debate on women's rights generally. Until then, women had been marginalised by the existing and predominantly male artists' exhibiting societies (Sellars 1988, 1, 2).

On a national level, local municipalities established galleries, museums, town halls and libraries which, in turn, necessitated the employment of scholars and administrators, some of whom were women. They included Bertha Hindshaw curator of the Manchester Art Museum (Campbell Orr 1995, 23). Lady Henrietta Barnett established the Whitechapel Art Gallery in London and Henrietta Rae was invited in 1893 to serve on the Hanging Committee of the Lever Art Gallery, the first woman to do so (Sellars 1988, 5). Lady Georgiana Burne-Jones



sat as County Councillor and served on the board of Trustees of the South London Art Gallery, co-Trustee was Mary Watts, second wife of the painter George Frederic Watts. It was also acceptable for Parliament to vote for funds for the nation's cultural provision long before it was acceptable for it to intervene in public health, education or working regulations.

Bertha's proposal to open an art school in Cape Town suggests that she had the creative vision but perhaps insufficient funds or a suitably large network of like-minded people who could have assisted her in this area. The art world in South Africa was competitive and apparently quite insular. It is known that Roworth and his male associates dominated the art society in Cape Town. Their autocracy appears to have established a hierarchy in the art world that largely seems to have excluded women from positions of power.

It is significant that Florence Phillips purchased Bertha's award-winning Mid-Winter on the Komati (1910) (Fig. 39). In doing so she recognised and publicly affirmed Bertha's status as a female artist. One can only speculate how this choice must have rankled critics such as Roworth. It may also have attributed to his omission of her work in subsequent articles on South African landscape.

With industrialisation in England, the expansion of amateur painting was facilitated by the development in painting technology and the supply of equipment, and manuals to assist aspiring artists. This provided for the growing market of Victorian women who painted at home. Women authors and illustrators were employed in the making of instruction manuals for watercolours. As widows, some middle-class women were able to continue their husbands' art dealership businesses after their husband's death (Campbell Orr 1995).

After the 1870s, restrictions were lessening and opportunities widening. Campbell Orr (1995, 17) suggests that: "...a trend which benefited women was the commercialised version of 'Aestheticism' and its related ideas on tasteful dress and home décor" and that furnishing shops like Liberty's (established 1876) supplied furnishing and objects for the home. Similarly, books such as the Macmillan series Art at Home, advised those unsure of their own taste. The newly opened department stores also provided a safe haven for women in the

city. Some restaurants were established that catered expressly for women by women, because it was not customary for women to dine alone in public. Chaperoning, however, was outmoded by the 1890s (Walker in Campbell Orr 1995, 76).

Victorians were heir to the Romantic Movement in art, which both compromised and inspired the efforts of women. Men also encountered the difficulties of the demands made by this movement, which demanded expression rather than imitation. The ethos was to transform artistic conventions, discover new subject matter, rewrite the rules of art, that artistic genius was born not taught and that the artist's vision should not be compromised by public, patron or fashion in the quest for self-identity. Gardner (1970, 625-626) suggests: "...the reality for which they (largely men) sought was deeper than convention and traditional, for the 'natural' man hidden beneath the conventional man hidden beneath man formed by society." Women were, by the nature of their gender, not generally included in this ethos, as they were not sanctioned by society to behave outside their "natural" station in life as nurturers and guardians of morality. Notwithstanding Angelica Kauffman's success as an academic classicist and a founder member of the Royal Academy, the highest form of painting was considered to be history painting. This could be "a religious, classical, literary or contemporary subject of national significance" which had to be more than a mere documenting of the event but also conveyed "lasting moral truths, drawing out the universally significant characteristics of noble human endeavour from the circumstantial event" (Campbell Orr 1995, 15 and Treuherz 1993, 11).

Unlike men, however, who were, as Romantic artists, able to dismiss academic training and explore unconventional modes of living (such as illicit love and consciousness-altering drugs), women were expected to be modest, self-denying, relational creatures who put being a mother, wife, sister or daughter before anything else, and were encouraged to lead respectable lives. Campbell Orr reasserts that while men had their own sources of stress in this field, their route to achievement was a fairly straightforward one by comparison (Campbell Orr 1995, 16).

Bertha's romantic inclinations are evident in much of her work. Despite this, she appeared to

subscribe to conventional notions of propriety, despite privately held misgivings about women's roles. Charles, on the other hand, appears to have allowed free reign with regard to the children's upbringing and with Bertha's travel plans. His frequent absence from the family may have been out of choice, but Bertha's role of mother first and artist second was a necessity urged by convention.

Cultural icons of Romanticism were more often male (Goethe, Scott and Byron). However, Campbell Orr cites examples of women who countered this predominantly male ideal. An antidote to the conventional self-effacing female role model was the Romantic literary heroine who lived and died for love but also aspired to glory. Madame de Stael's fictional heroine, Corinne, was one such example. Through Corinne, many Victorian women could live vicariously, or be inspired to act similarly (Marsh in Campbell Orr 1995, 38). Anna Jameson's *Diary of an Ennuyee* (1826) is a cultural travelogue and emulation of Byron's world-weary outsider. Barbara Leigh Smith (later Bodichon), a feminist, landscape artist and writer who admired Charlotte Brontë and George Sand, "articulated her own female Romantic aesthetic [which] embraced both art and activism in disinterested love for nature and humanity" (Campbell Orr 1995, 16).

Marsh cites the examples of two women who aspired to the Romantic ideal. They were Anna Mary Howitt and Jane Benham, who sought artistic training in Germany only to discover that as in England, this facility was not available to women. They were visited by Barbara Leigh Smith and dreamed about founding an art sisterhood, based in part on the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and the charitable religious sisterhoods that were then flourishing in England. Neither college nor sisterhood ever took formal shape but an informal network similar to the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood flourished in the 1850s that included the writer Bessie Parkes. These women went on sketching trips together to Wales and the Sussex coast, in the manner of serious male artists who spent summers sketching outdoors to prepare for winter studio work. In their correspondence they recorded their experiences and the ambition and determination to succeed. Howitt wrote in light-hearted verse:

I paint  
From morn till eve, from morn to eve again  
Striving against the hindrance of time  
And all the weight of custom; and I will  
I tell you Lillian I will succeed

(Marsh in Campbell Orr 1995, 39).

They also expressed dismay at the frequent and disrupting visits from curious friends. Mutual support and stimulus were essential features of the women's friendship, offering each other consolation and encouragement (Marsh in Campbell Orr 1993, 39, 40).

Bertha's most significant confidant was undoubtedly Edith. While her love for and interest in Bertha's work is undisputed, it is suggested that advice and criticism from more varied sources may have been beneficial. Bertha may have been less dependent on Edith's opinion and have been able to make more informed decisions about her own work.

Howitt's success was brief but noteworthy in its idealistic representation of such avant garde subjects as scenes from the life of Dant , work inspired by the poet Shelley, and the fallen woman theme, namely Castaway (similar to Holman Hunt's Awakening Conscience). The topic of sexual transgression was considered a bold subject "for a woman" and excited much comment. However, it was her Boadicea brooding over her wrongs (Marsh indicates that no further information is available and its whereabouts are unknown) that she regarded as her masterpiece. This work was rejected by the Royal Academy and sent instead to the Crystal palace exhibition where John Ruskin was asked to give an opinion of it. His response, in a private letter, is worth quoting: "What do you know about Boadicea? Leave such subjects alone and paint me a pheasant's wing." (Marsh in Campbell Orr 1993, 40).

Other women drew on Madame de Stael's fictional heroine, Corinne, an example of female artistic self-expression, or emulated the liberally-minded, culturally authoritative tone of de Stael's essays on culture. Women made contributions to Romantic nationalism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as mediators and translators. Campbell Orr cites Lady Charlotte Schreiber's translation of The Mabinogion which was an important ingredient in the Victorian construction of Welsh identity and an inspiration for Tennyson's Arthurian poems (Campbell

Orr 1995, 17).

There were many obstacles facing women who wished to pursue a career in art: in training, exhibition space, critical attention, patronage, domestic demands, familial obligations, confidence, motivation and single-minded self-promotion (Marsh in Campbell Orr 1995, 33).

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century a necessary egotism was required to become a successful artist of either gender. Sir Joshua Reynolds warned his (male) students at the Royal Academy in Discourses on Art (1797) that: "... without the love of fame you can never do anything excellent." (Marsh in Campbell Orr 1995, 33)

A century later, Harriet Martineau expressed the generally held view that:

The painter must depend for success and stimulus and for professional rewards on the opinions of others...and his position is one which attracts attention to the world's opinion of him. He must therefore be strong in his love of art and his self respect before he commits himself to his career, or he may pass life in misery and end it in despair (Martineau in Campbell Orr 1995, 34).

How much more difficult would it have been for women to rise to these challenges? What was urged on men was strictly forbidden to women. Men were expected to have confidence, ambition and self-respect, whereas women were expected to be modest, self-effacing and altruistic. Success in art also largely (but not exclusively) depended on reputation, not anonymity. The struggle to "make a name" for oneself in the history of art is a well documented phenomenon in art history. The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood may be singled out as having achieved fame without bowing to this particular convention. Marsh points out that many institutions and "ladders" to success were closed to women, requiring them to have "double-doses" of ambition and notes Anna Howitt's (coeval to the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood) despair and (misplaced) anger against her sex at being prevented from studying at the Royal Academy (Marsh in Campbell Orr 1995, 34-35).

Bertha's preference for farm life, pride and dislike of socialising, as well as self-consciousness did not provide her with ideal personal traits to establish a name for herself in



the South African art world. Her determination to paint is clear; her determination to succeed in the art world is less apparent.

The acquisition of the Elgin Marbles by the British Museum was considered an important resource for training art students, who were permitted to view the statues without discrimination as to sex. Greek sculpture was seen as the “apogee of art”, with other art from earlier and different civilisations ranked behind it in “a supposed hierarchy of artistic achievement” (Campbell Orr 1995, 20). The widening of taste away from classical standards was facilitated by a trend towards cultural relativism, which facilitated an appreciation of other cultures’ artistic merits on its own terms. Thus, the travel writings of such as Maria Graham on Indian art, and the excavations of Henry Layard at Ninevah, and the discoveries of the art of America, Africa and Oceania succeeded in broadening of contemporary taste in art (Campbell Orr 1995, 21).

Elizabeth Siddal, well known as the model for members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, (Millais’ Ophelia, Hunt’s Sylvia and Rossetti’s St Catherine, Beatrice and others) married Rossetti. She was an aspiring artist who became Rossetti’s pupil, partly as a camouflage for a budding romance between them, and to further her tuition (Marsh refers to this as “guidance” rather than tuition), in the absence of any recognised institutional teaching facilities for women. Ruskin, in an uncharacteristic approval of a woman’s work, offered to purchase a quantity of her work for £30. Thereafter, he offered to pay her an allowance of £150 for a year to enable her to travel and live independently. Proud, spirited and independent, Siddal did not appreciate the significance of such a noteworthy patron, which she perceived as patronising, preferring to sell her work on merit to a number of buyers. However, she was persuaded and Ruskin is alleged to have called her “Ida” after Tennyson’s feminist princess (Marsh in Campbell Orr 1995, 43).

Marsh also notes that during a period when Siddal and Rossetti were estranged before their marriage, Siddal was unsuccessful at promoting her own work. The reason suggested was that without Rossetti’s presence, Siddal’s work in professional isolation did not gain admittance to the art world. After their marriage, Rossetti supported and encouraged her

work. Marsh suggests that Siddal did not enjoy (for various reasons relating to class and gender) the support of female friendship, which may have provided a space in which she could have operated during Siddal's estrangement from her husband (Marsh in Campbell Orr 1995, 44-46).

The mark of professionalism was undoubtedly the public exhibition and sale of work. Excluded from the halls of academia, women had to negotiate their access to training and exhibition space, as well as the marketing of their art. Rosa Bonheur was fortunate enough to have the enviable attributes for a successful marketing campaign by Gambart in that she was foreign (French, so acceptably "different"), already an acclaimed painter of animals in large scale works, and often wore male attire. Bonheur's disregard for Victorian English conventions may be traced back to her father's adoption of the Saint-Simonian movement that was based on economic socialism and equality of the sexes (Piland 1978, 188).

Gambart and Flatow were two dealers in fine art who dominated the Victorian art market at one time. Ernest Gambart was a Belgian who supported Rosa Bonheur and Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon, while Louis Victor Flatow was a Prussian Jew immigrant whose egalitarian relationship with his wife was remarkable for that time. It is significant that both of the acclaimed British painters, Bonheur and Bodichon, were women whose forceful personalities and somewhat eccentric life-styles made them marketable in the art world at that time.

Part of the philanthropic ideal to bring culture to the general public (and line their own pockets) gave birth to the idea of reproductions of fine art (painting) in the form of engravings. Women were employed in the safety of their homes to copy the masters and mistresses; Kauffman's Queen Charlotte Raising the Genius of the Fine Arts was a popular acquisition. Industrialisation soon stopped this as print technology was transformed into mass production. Copying was also seen to be more in keeping with the female temperament, as women were seen to be lacking in the so-called masculine attribute of inventiveness or creativity, according to Ruskin (Campbell Orr 1995, 12).

Harmesen (1980, 10) suggests that Bertha attempted to reproduce some artworks as a young

student early in her life, possibly Study of butterflies and flowers (nd) (not illustrated), which is similar to Water lily pond (1895) (Fig. 1), simply as a technical exercise, but there are no other known examples and she does not seem to have attempted this at any later stage.

The expanding market for books and magazines also created a market for illustration. Elizabeth Siddal's illustrations of Tennyson and Browning were an attempt to emulate the male Pre-Raphaelites in artist-writer collaboration. A mark of status in this area was the commissioning of an architect to build a studio as a workplace for this purpose, as was done by Kate Greenaway (1846-1901). Her immensely successful work reinforced the cult of mothers and children and gender biases (Campbell Orr 1995, 13 and Treuherz 1993, 160). Women were considered to be naturally suited to botanical illustration, as this could be accomplished in the home environment (green-house or conservatory) and was perceived as a genteel and ladylike occupation. However, the career of Marianne North, who travelled widely in search of botanical specimens, disclaims the presumption that all Victorian women were home-bound. Artistic accomplishment learned in youth did enable some women to supplement their income from home. Mary Harrison, after losing her husband, suffered financial disaster and became an invalid with twelve children to support. She used her accomplishment as a water-colourist as a source of income (Sellars 1988, 2). Others used their drawing ability to design embroidery samplers.

The difficulties women experienced were not confined to education, production and exhibition, but were equally prevalent in criticism and theory. While women who visited galleries were expected to have opinions, the expression of such should be confined to personal friends and not in order to earn a living from it. Aspirant female critics had to learn to write for the public press in a manner endorsed by male standards of taste before being recognised as serious critics. Male criticism of women's work was often patronising especially when they attempted the "masculine" genre of history painting (Campbell Orr 1995, 19).

John Ruskin, an influential art critic, had a crushing effect on some female artists, evidenced by his comments on Anna Mary Howitt's attempts at history painting. There were "victims"

and “heroines” who failed or triumphed as a result of their response to his criticism (Campbell Orr 1995, 19). Ruskin (1819-1900), artist and founder member of the Burlington Fine Arts Club (1856), Slade professor (1869-1879; 1883-1885, when Herkomer took over) and founder of the Ruskin School of Drawing, Oxford (1871), was an influential, controversial and harsh art critic of both male and female artists who did not match his ideas of professionalism in painting. W.L. Lindus (1823-1907) burned most of his work in old age as Ruskin had accused him of lacking “a stout arm, a calm mind, a merry heart and a bright eye” (Hubbard 1951, 45, 46).

Ruskin felt that mass-production had debased the applied arts and degraded the craftsman and upheld the Middle Ages instead as exemplar. The Pre-Raphaelites and William Morris (1844-1896) naturally found favour with Ruskin (Poulson 1989, 35). Ruskin and Whistler, however, clashed over Ruskin’s criticism of Whistler’s alleged conceit and highly-priced series, Nocturnes. Ruskin criticised Whistler for “flinging a pot of paint in the public’s face” (Hubbard 1951, 117). The notorious libel suit that followed concluded that Ruskin had a right to express his opinion about art but not about the artist’s personality. Whistler won but was bankrupted. So great was Ruskin’s popularity that the public paid his costs (Hubbard 1951, 117-119).

Marsh notes that despite the fact that women were still excluded from training at the Academy and reared in a culture whose standard view was that “no woman can paint” (Ruskin in Campbell Orr, 1995, 35), there was a substantial rise in the number of professional painters in the national Census from 278 women in 1841 to 1069 in 1871. It would appear that women artists tended to choose female subjects for their classical, literary or Biblical subjects that reflected loneliness and suffering. One such was Jessie Macgregor, who specialised in historical subjects and portraits (Sellars 1988, 4).

Even as late as 1876, Alexandra Sutherland Orr wrote that “women are intelligent: they are not creative. That men possess the productiveness which is called genius and women do not, is the one immutable distinction that is bound up with the intellectual idea of sex.” (Marsh in Campbell Orr 1995, 35) Marsh also gives an example of the legendary Corinthian maid who



traced the profile of her father's shadow on a wall; he then filled the outline with clay, creating a relief sculpture, winning fame and fortune for his creation. The daughter's work was mere imitation, inspired by love, whereas his was creative genius. Such theories must have discouraged many aspiring young female artists and it may have become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Ruskin's remark that women could imitate rather than originate reinforced the assumption that women were incapable or less capable of depicting universal significance, either through lesser intellectual capacity or defective training. Women campaigners for improved education and training artists, and their inclusion in the Royal Academy and its training schools, was influenced by an economic awareness for the need of some women to earn their own living. The advanced idea that talent and application was all that was required in modern times would, as Campbell Orr suggests, "have tempered high-flown Romantic ideas about the artist as wild genius." (Campbell Orr 1995, 15).

Perhaps as a move towards establishing some independence from her foster family, Bertha applied for the position of art teacher in Pretoria. This desire to move to a distant country may have been influenced by some nostalgic or sentimental memory of her birthplace, a romantic notion of adventure in Africa or a desire for independence and removal from what may have been perceived as confining conditions at home. Bertha's education in both music and art would have provided a way of earning a living necessary to a woman in her position of limited financial resources.

It may be speculated that Bertha was aware of an interesting phenomenon that Edwardian painters, influenced by the Impressionists and spending less time on their works, were not able to fetch high prices for single paintings, as for example, had been done by artists such as Frith and Alma-Tadema, whose meticulous attention to detail was commended. Also, the preference for the work of tried and tested artists from the past proved to be a hindrance to the artists living at that time. Hubbard (1951, 188, 189) suggests that there was a great deal of poor quality painting being done at this time and that it may have been difficult to notice work of merit that was either unremarkable because of its small size or because it was poorly



hung in the big, mixed exhibitions.

Despite the fact that early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century the British government was economically less flush, a fund called the Friends of the National Gallery (1900) was established to acquire more artworks as many were beyond the means of the National Gallery's budget. Despite the fiscal problems being experienced, King Edward opened a new extension to the Victoria and Albert Museum that was to house recently bequeathed art collections, and the Whitechapel Art Gallery and Watts Gallery were opened in 1904 (Hubbard 1951, 192, 199). The English penchant for creating societies that were supportive of art and artists is noted. Similar societies appear to have been fairly scarce in South Africa. The Royal British Academy elected its first women members in 1902, whereas in South Africa it appears that women were few in the male-dominated art societies at that time.

English art society was disrupted by the outbreak of war. Between the South African War (1899-1902) and World War I (1914-1918) there was a decline in the number of works submitted to the Academy (Herkomer, the Professor of Painting, retired in 1901) and other galleries and public interest in art waned (Hubbard 1951, 194-195) although Sellars (1988, 2) notes that there was an increase in the exhibition of women's art. The New English Art Club (founded 1886) and considered the "home" of English Impressionism, the International Society (founded 1899 as a subsidiary to the International Society of Literature Science and Art established in 1890) and the Camden Town Group (established 1911 and later known as the London Group) attracted many of the better young English painters away from the Royal Academy that devoted exhibitions to recently deceased academicians (Hubbard 1951, 196).

However, the art world appears to have been invigorated in 1904 by the Bloomsbury Group. This group originated in 1904 when Vanessa, Thoby, Virginia and Adrian Stephen moved from the fashionable Kensington area, to the "grey area" of Bloomsbury, where working-class families lived next door to bourgeois households. They were a respectable upper middle-class family whose late father had been a distinguished Victorian biographer. Ridding themselves of Victorian bric-a-brac and heavy furniture, the young Stephens soon established a group of avant-garde artists, writers and poets, who met to discuss a wide range

of topics from philosophy to sex (Arnold 1987, 5).

This group of friends and like-minded artists rebelled against Victorian narrative painting and highly-finished works. Under Fry's leadership, they reasserted the picture plane and removed all traces of sentimentality or the picturesque, favouring instead the more spontaneous application of paint as advocated by Impressionism.

Educated and refined, inhabiting an area similar to Digby's borderland, this Bohemian community seemed to be largely self-reliant and anti-establishment, mocking Victorian morality, refinements and cluttered interior decoration, preferring the unrefined to the refined while maintaining in their lives some sense of decorum.

Largely comprised of upper middle-class intellectuals, artists and philosophers this group seemed to have had independent financial resources and were not strictly dependent on the sale of their art. The Omega Workshop seems to have been closed because of a quarrel between the two chief organisers rather than as a direct result of their straitened financial circumstances.

The group's identity was never fixed, but included such as Leonard Woolf, Duncan Grant, Clive Bell (who married Vanessa), Roger Fry, Saxon Sydney-Turner, Lytton Strachey, Maynard Keynes and E. M. (Morgan) Forster. Many of the group achieved fame (or notoriety) in their field of practice and many well-known artists, writers and philosophers such as Bertrand Russell, T. S. Elliot, D. H. Lawrence, Aldous Huxley and W. B. Yeats were entertained at the *soirées* there.

Fry, likened to Ruskin in his time for his influence on his contemporaries (Hubbard 1951, 224), was important for his contribution to the establishment of the Courtauld Institute (1930) for the study of the History of Art, and the training of art critics and experts (Hubbard 1951, 224) and for his contribution to the New English Art Club's independence from the Royal Academy and government institutions. Fry later admonished the New English Art Club for their dependence on representation (Anscombe 1981, 16).

Fry was also important for his unequivocal support of the Post-Impressionists in England, organising two exhibitions of their work, namely Manet and the Post-Impressionists in 1910 in London and secondly at the Grafton Galleries in 1912, where some English and Russian artists were represented but dominated by the French.

The English artists represented at the second Post-Impressionist exhibition were Fry, Gore, Grant, Lewis, Spencer and Wadsworth the same as for the first exhibition, but also included were Adeney, Etchells, Gill, Gore, Hamilton, Lamb and Spencer (Anscombe 1981, 16). Augustus John declined to participate after accepting the invitation initially. Arnold argues that in contrast to the French work, the English work was “a most heterogeneous collection which was “derivative, hesitant and dubiously Post-Impressionist” and, not surprisingly, “transitional” (Arnold 1987, 9). A French critic remarked in the 1920s that while the London Group exhibitors (Baynes, Vanessa Bell, Fry, Grant, Meninsky and Paul Nash,) possessed a “natural gift for colour and sincere sensibility, their weakness was lack of design” (Hubbard 1951, 256, 257).

In another exhibition organised by Fry entitled Exposition de Quelques Artistes Independants Anglais, in 1912 in Paris, the works of contemporary English artists such as Vanessa Bell, Etchells, Fry, Ginner, Grant, Holmes, Lewis and Saunders were put on show (Arnold 1987, 9). This drew an enormous amount of hostile criticism from British artists, art critics and the public (Hubbard 1951, 200, 201).

In 1920, Vision and Design, a collection of Fry's essays was published, giving English Modernism a theoretical base. Arnold (1987) describes his work, saying that his formalism was a practical system for the perception of art, and a way of teaching people to look without preconceptions about content. Formal values were used to assert the separation of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century pictorial principles - Victorian narrative versus Modernist purity. According to Arnold, Fry suggested that Post-Impressionist artists attempted to express, by pictorial and plastic form, certain spiritual experiences. This idea, with its emphasis on the formal elements of image construction, downgrades the empiricism of 19<sup>th</sup> century naturalism and

the moral significance of subject matter. Simultaneously, it elevates the expressive qualities fundamental to pictorial form (Arnold 1987, 10). These ideas continued to motivate certain artists, including, it may be speculated, Bertha's own work. Certainly, during her stay in England and France (1922-1926), her work took on far greater, more confident expressive qualities.

Fry's essays on art assisted the likes of Bertha who could learn about the new perceptions and motivations in modern art through articles in art magazines. Fry believed that the design principles inherent in visual expression were strengthened by his contact with Byzantine art, and this became visible in his art.

During this so-called "transitional" (Arnold 1987, 10) period of English art where the majority of work appears to have been regarded as second-rate, Fry's motivation, optimism and influence was important. He promoted more creative art teaching methods and placed emphasis on design aspects and subjective colour in order to move away from Renaissance principles, while still adhering to perceptual experience as the basis for structuring the picture plane in sequences of colour and decorative shape (Arnold 1987, 10).

Bell, Fry and Grant's work showed the influence of the French artists, as did Gilman, Ginner and other members of the Fitzroy Street Group who considered Walter Sickert to be their mentor (Arnold 1987, 8). It was in this climate that Fry organised the Manet and the Post-Impressionists Exhibition in 1910 (Hubbard 1951, 200). Two years later, Picasso's work was exhibited in 1912 along with work by Fry, Gore, Grant, Lamb, Lewis, Spencer and Wadsworth. Picasso's work popularised the romantic notion of artist-genius (Hubbard 1951, 201).

Fry was supportive of the innovative teaching methods of Richardson (a woman art teacher during World War 1) who introduced a less restrictive, more informal and creative approach to art teaching at schools (Hubbard 1951, 262). Similar advanced ideas on more creative teaching methods may well have inspired Bertha's own advanced pedagogical ideas in art. Despite a retreat from experimentation after World War 1, the Bloomsbury painters still

utilised perceptual experience as the basis for structuring the picture plane in sequences of colour and decorative shape (Arnold 1987, 10). Bertha's experimentation with aspects of design may have stemmed from this influence.

Erik Hesketh Hubbard (1892-1957), British painter, printmaker and writer, who was active at that time, praises the work of Duncan Grant but points out that Grant had studied the old masters at the Westminster School of Art for eight years before "taking liberties with his materials or the treatment of his subjects" (Hubbard 1951, 273). It may have been that Bertha's understanding of the perceived importance of progressing from the study of the old masters made her hesitant about discarding current academic notions of finish and naturalism.

Hubbard (1951, 274) described Vanessa Bell as a "vigorous and solid painter of portraits and still-lives, happy and personal in colour" (Hubbard 1951, 273, 274). This somewhat patronising tone that emphasises the "personal" nature of Bell's colour is symptomatic of the prevailing patriarchal notion that women's work is emotional and suggests that he may have regarded her work as less valuable.

Ruth, Bertha's daughter, then twenty-one years old, was engaged briefly to the thirty-two-year-old Hubbard in 1928 (Arnold 2000, 60). The engagement ended apparently because Hubbard felt unable to commit himself, causing Ruth much distress. Initially Bertha appears to have been in favour of Hubbard as Ruth's teacher, but this soon changed when a romantic liaison began. Bertha naturally rose to Ruth's defence and expressed her dislike of the man, his work, and his mother in no uncertain terms: "I don't like Mrs H [Hubbard] and I don't like her son and I don't like his work... and I don't like anything about the whole affair..." (Arnold 2000, 60). Bertha's perceptions of Hubbard suggest she found him arrogant and self-centred (TAG letter no 83 dated 14.9.1925/6), referring to him as "... a small sneaky cowardly little school boy" and that he was "... such a disagreeable man, hating women and despising them, and all the time wanting all the good things they have to offer" (TAG undated letter no 95).



Hubbard's glossing over or exclusion of the work of many significant women in the British art world in favour of men is noticeable. By ascribing Bell's work and others to a lesser rank, he perpetuates the notions that Ruskin had expressed. Likewise, Hubbard expresses his disapproval of the establishment of the Society of Female Artists (established 1877) by quoting what may have been (he does not specify the origin of the quote) a general view at that time that art would never take woman "out of her natural sphere, or tempt her to abandon the enjoyments of the home, or interfere with the household duties which are, as they ought to be, woman's privilege, pride and reward" (Hubbard 1951, 107). The general perception that a woman's "natural" place was in the home is evident, and signifies the dominance of such perceptions on Bertha's experience. Bertha expressed her antipathy towards such conventional notions regarding marriage and sexuality arguing that:

...the old conventions [that] are man made are terribly irksome to intellectual and progressive women. The one thing against my ideas is that the world is still so shocked but then the world is shocked at everything progressive except science... (Arnold 2000, 60).

The English had viewed Impressionism with suspicion, partly as it was foreign, and partly because of its sketchy appearance, preferring the slick finishes of such as Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema (1836-1912). Fry did not approve of highly finished works and said of Alma-Tadema that he had "learnt to lick and polish his paint so that all trace of expression, all remnants of vital or sensitive handling that there might have been ...were completely obliterated" (Arnold 1987, 7). Highly finished representational, narrative subjects were prized above expression or impressionistic painting. Queen Victoria favoured William Frith's paintings because of their fashionable contemporary subject matter, colour and high degree of finish, and the public followed suit (Treuhertz 1993, 106). Frith, no doubt emboldened by his success and Royal patronage, expressed the outrage of viewers who regarded impressionistic painting as a result of madness or disease. His contemporary, George Frederick Watts, whose meticulous rendering of nature was the antithesis of Impressionism, also subscribed to this view (Arnold 1987, 7).

Leigh (2000, 81) maintains that Bertha "clung resolutely to the older British landscape style", despite the fact that there was a host of artists who worked in the epic literary style inherited

from the Pre-Raphaelites, an English avant-garde (members of The New English Art Club) that had flirted with Impressionism since the first Impressionist exhibition in England in 1882, and Whistler, Sickert and Steer, who advocated Impressionism (Leigh 2000, 81). By the late 1800s, the “London Impressionists” for the most part lacked unity of purpose with regard to true Impressionist principles or methods (Arnold 1987, 7). Bertha’s work shows evidence of her experimentation with somewhat looser, more impastoed paint application at this time, for example, in Edith picking flowers (1900) (Fig. 17). However, unlike the Impressionists, Bertha retained the old-school technique of dark under-painting and a nostalgic preference for the picturesque which may have stemmed from her studies with Olsson and Herkomer, where the underlying romantic notion of the “sublime” were part of the thinking when Bertha began her studies. Studies of the old Dutch, Flemish and Italian masters were carried out by students of landscape painting. Leigh states:

A characteristic of these European masters, subsequently discernable in British art, is the use of landscape as metaphor for the artist’s own intellectual and spiritual perceptions, moods and emotions. Bertha King probably saw this quality as something particularly valuable to herself. It enabled her to explore her own painterly goals and express her own strong feelings (Leigh 2000, 80).

Leigh (2000, 83, 84) points out that the Everard library contained a book by Alfred W. Rich called Water Colour Painting (London 1921). Rich was a member of the New English Art Club at a time when the principles of Impressionism were being embraced but still had a base of solid drawing and *plein air* painting. Leigh suggests that the drawings in this manual are very similar to those preparatory drawings in Bertha’s sketchbooks of clouds overlying landscapes (Fig. 131).

According to Arnold (1987, 7) Virginia Woolf remarked at the time of the first Post-Impressionist Exhibition in November 1910, that there was a noticeable change in human character. Arnold (1987) suggests that this was because:

... the artists had re-assessed objectives, balancing perception of the external world with concepts and symbols of reality, and modifying illusionism so that the physicality of the painting’s service was acknowledged. The Post-Impressionist artists attempted to express realities not confined to appearances. They rejected

mimetic goals in favour of processes of transformation that converted experience to pictorial language. The functional interaction of formal elements created equivalents of nature and form became expressive in itself rather than being the mere vehicle for description (Arnold 1987, 6).

As with the Impressionists, the Post-Impressionists were labelled as “lunatic” or “abnormal”, their work “pornographic” and of being done by “anarchists”, despite their conventional subject matter (Arnold 1987, 8). These critics were referring to works such as van Gogh’s Sunflowers (1888), Wheatfields with crows (1890), Gauguin’s Christ in the garden of olives (1889), Spirit of the dead watching (1892) and Cézanne’s Woman with a rosary (c1898) and The great pine (1892-96) (Arnold 1987, 7). Their criticism could not have been aimed at the content or subject matter but at the “...exuberant use of textured paint and strong colour...” which offended their notions of “classically ordered painting” (Arnold 1987, 7).

The reason for the public’s disapproval of the Post-Impressionists, Arnold suggests, was because they transferred the uncertainty about life to inanimate paintings, and that the paintings became the target of abuse. She remarks that: “In 1901 change was in the air. Not only were monarch’s - those symbols of stability - dying, but also the physical world was being transformed, and the social fabric was showing signs of stress.” (Arnold 1987, 8). She points to the changes in technology and communications, the Suffragette militancy that began in 1909 to defy patriarchal supremacy and the severe labour unrest and strikes in 1910, which all showed dissatisfaction with the status quo. Anarchy in life was represented by anarchy in art. Modernism’s rejection of established artistic language, and not its remarkably tame subject matter, signified new meaning (Arnold 1987, 8).

Fry supported Post Impressionism unequivocally and regarded Cézanne as a painter of immense significance. This opinion cost Fry valuable academic support. He argued that Post Impressionism indicated a return to “pictorial traditions overlooked during the long dominance of illusionism”, saying that they revolted against the photographic vision of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the realism of the past four hundred years, and that they represented a successful “attempt to go behind the too elaborate pictorial apparatus which the Renaissance established in painting”. (Arnold 1987, 8).

Between 1900-1914, many varied styles and objectives co-existed in English art. This dichotomy is perceptible in the work of Clausen, Orpen and Steer and others, who clung to entrenched conventions of representation or Fry, Grant Bell, Gilman, Gore and others, who undermined the dominant style. Although each English painter was committed to a personal vision, some dared to be different, while others were content to maintain the existing order (Arnold 1987, 9 and Hubbard 1951, 188-212).

Arnold mentions the Vorticists (Lewis, Wadsworth, Hamilton, Atkinson, Dismorr, Saunders and Gaudier-Brzeska), who epitomised the period of experimentalism between 1911-1914. They stridently challenged the Post-Impressionists and were attracted to the iconoclastic manifestoes of the Italian Futurists, who mounted a radical and aggressive public crusade against staid British convention (Arnold 1987, 9).

From 1900 to 1914, many art schools and art societies were formed. These ranged from the national to the privately-funded (Hubbard 1951, 206, 207). Despite the scarcity of money, it seems that it became popular to attend art sales where people speculated in art, just as others gambled in cotton or wheat. Herkomer, whose school at Bushey was closed in 1904, shrewdly and successfully arranged to buy his own pictures at art dealers auctions in order to maintain his prices (Hubbard 1951, 211). Art magazines such as *Magazine of Art*, *Art Journal* and *The Studio* flourished. The *Connoisseur* and *Burlington* magazines were launched in the early 1900s as well as *Colour*, which reproduced in full colour many contemporary paintings and interior decoration, including work done by the often maligned Bloomsbury Group at the Omega Workshops (Anscombe 1988). *Blast* and the *Art Chronicle* also appeared at this time (Hubbard 1951, 211, 212). Significant also were the assaults on Velasquez' Rokeby Venus by a Suffragette in 1914, and a later attack on Sargent's portrait of Henry James, on Herkomer's portrait of the Duke of Wellington and on Clausen's Primavera. Hubbard suggests the suffragette's attack was inspired by a similar attack by a "madman" on a Constable and a Wilson some years before. Hubbard also attributes the failing health of the Director of the National Gallery, Sir Charles Holroyd, to the violent actions of the Suffragettes, and furthermore suggests that the outbreak of World War 1 saved the directors of further anxiety on this score (Hubbard 1951, 212).



The war was indirectly responsible for the dispersal or death of many British artists. Again, the Bloomsbury Group, although diminished in numbers, were active. The Omega Workshops opened by Fry in July 1913, attempted to integrate good design with daily living and they designed carpets, fabrics, furniture, murals and decorative objects, rejecting the Victorian love of refinement and cluttered bric-a-brac. In 1917, these workshops showed drawings by children who were trained along the novel lines of Richardson at Dudley High School. This must have had a marked effect on the next generation of painters (Hubbard 1951, 234). The workshop closed in 1919. Arnold notes that “by 1920 Gore, Gilman and Gaudier-Brzeska were dead, Strachey and Keynes were famous, Fry was notorious, and Virginia Woolf was just beginning to make her mark as a writer” (Arnold 1987, 9).

The Tate was reopened in 1920 as it had been closed during wartime. Reappraisal of national galleries and museums was conducted because of concern that these British institutions were lacking in certain areas. Fearing there would be another war, an evacuation scheme for works of art was devised in 1933 (Hubbard 1951, 242-247).

Arnold (1987) suggests, however, that peace brought disillusionment. Unemployment was high and there was dissatisfaction among women who, after having worked during the war, were no longer prepared to return to the domestic sphere. Arnold suggests that the spirit of optimism and faith that once characterised Early English Modernism had become blunted and that “individuals felt isolated in their fractured society; the expression of common purpose that is part of a cultural movement seemed inappropriate. In the 1920s, artists turned in on themselves, seeking to consolidate and reassess, rather than confront. Stylisation yielded to realism, and self-consciousness to unpretentiousness.” (Arnold 1987, 10).

Campbell Orr (1995) says that art historians Jane Beckett, Griselda Pollock and Deborah Cherry argued that as artists rewrote the rules of 19<sup>th</sup> century art and created the canons of Modernism, they emphasised the masculine identity of the avant-garde artist, once again excluding women. She attributes that the very success with which some women had entered



the Victorian art world, by pushing out of the boundaries of what was possible, had turned against them. Their art, alongside that of their male counterparts, was being deemed old-fashioned (Campbell Orr 1995, 25). Campbell Orr states:

History is often uneven and there is seldom a straightforward linear progression for women. As I have suggested Victorians could imagine themselves to be recovering ground lost since late Georgian times rather than doing something unprecedented. Nonetheless, while 20<sup>th</sup> century women undoubtedly faced fresh limitations or new formulations of old ones, the women of the Victorian art world, some of whose lives are discussed in this book, had set precedents for refusing to be limited by the world as they encountered it (Campbell Orr 1995, 25).

Art in Western countries, Arnold (1987, 10) suggests, including South Africa, is demonstrating a recovery of meaning and “the return of figuration and realist modes of expression, and the re-admission of metaphor and symbol to art vocabulary has enabled art to reach a new audience, and to assert the role of art as a means of intellectual provocation” (Arnold 1987, 10). This is significant because in the 1950s in South Africa, Bertha’s art was overlooked by many artists, critics and the public, in preference for more avant-garde, non-representational work.

The terms parochial and representational could be used to describe some of Bertha’s work. These terms were anathema to Modernism’s concepts of art, and may still imply negative connotations. Bertha fits uncomfortably between the “isms” of Modernism that are difficult to define. In the more egalitarian ethos of Postmodernism, with its assertion of eclecticism, the vernacular and reappraisal of indigenous values and self-referential bias, Bertha’s work may find a more suitable home and be given credit for her contributing to South African landscape painting.

However, Stein-Lessing recognised the Everard Group’s contribution to South African art in 1955 and 1961 (Harmsen 1980, 206) but despite this fact and that they exhibited often as well as Edith’s attempts to gain publicity with some success, Bertha’s death in 1965 was unheralded.

Had Bertha been schooled differently, she might have been able to pursue art more single-mindedly. It may be speculated that the demands on her time succeed in making painting a necessary and sought-after interlude from domesticity. Perhaps these demands on her time were the reason she eventually stopped painting. Alternatively, perhaps Bertha's aversion to public appearances and negative criticism of her work was a valid reason for her retraction into the private sphere and her early retirement from painting. Likewise the restraining Victorian principle that money-making and public life was "unnatural" and "unfeminine" may have kept her from participating more actively with her contemporary, though mostly younger, members of the New Group.

Isolated by distance from the charitable sisterhoods and women's groups in England and South Africa, Bertha relied solely on Edith for support. Edith played a significant role in encouraging her to paint, and in the marketing and sale of Bertha's work. This alone was insufficient to sustain a lifelong battle against patriarchal discourses that strove to keep women from the public sphere. Undermined by her own disposition not to transgress, Bertha struggled to mediate between family commitments and her desire to paint. Although Bertha was referring primarily to issues of sexuality and gender, she said in a letter to Edith in 1928: "I wish I had read in my life books by people who have treated the subject in a really profound manner." (Arnold 2000, 62) Had Bertha had the opportunity to explore these and other issues relating to art, she might have done things quite differently.

## **CHAPTER 6: The South African context: the political landscape**

Arnold makes a pertinent observation that: “Despite the rhetoric of a succession of twentieth-century governments, it is still difficult to clarify what is meant by ‘South African’ because the definition has been so bedevilled by ideology that it resists unemotional explanation. Identity is, in fact, always provisional and flexible.” (Arnold 2000, 55).

To ascertain Bertha’s position in respect of her national identity in a minefield of conflicting information, it is necessary to re-examine the prevailing conditions on her arrival in South Africa in 1902 at the age of twenty-nine. She must have been aware of her difference from the largely Afrikaans-speaking farming community where she lived, having been schooled and trained at some of the more refined institutions in England and Europe. She travelled a great distance to Natal, a British-oriented enclave, to give birth to her first child in 1904, suggesting a desire to be among people of her own kind. It is also significant that Bertha had arranged for an English female doctor to be present at her delivery. Bertha’s concept of “self” as different from “other”, was being formed by the social hierarchy established by social Darwinism. Like many women, Bertha was largely unaware of the power of the traditions to which she conformed.

When Bertha arrived, South Africa was in the last throes of the South African War (1899-1902). The country was still divided ethnically and territorially, as a result of a long-standing antagonism between Dutch/Afrikaner/Boer and English speakers, and, of course, the black indigenous population who fought alongside the Boers in some instances, the English in others, and who were later used as labourers in World War 1 by the Union forces. It is the writing of these disparate histories that highlights the problem of verification of what being South African means. The neglect of a “black” history has until recently been glaringly obvious.

Preceding and during World War 1, the success of aggressive British propaganda widely published in Britain was undermined by Kitchener’s iniquitous scorched earth policy and the internment camps for Afrikaner women and children. No longer could war be portrayed as

honourable. It is significant that a British woman, Emily Hobhouse, was instrumental in drawing Britain's attention to the iniquities of war in the colony, and established a school for impoverished Afrikaner girls after the war (Saunders 1994, 134 and Arnold 1996, 52). That her sympathies lay with white Afrikaner women is telling, but understandable within the context of the general racial prejudice inherent in British Imperial philosophy. The Union of South Africa in 1910 served economic purposes, and ethnic or social divisions remained contentious. However, British governance interests were retained until 1960 when South Africa became a republic (Saunders 1994, 201). Racial and social harmony in the newly formed Union appears to have been an ephemeral ideal, soon to be disrupted by the Natives Land Act of 1913 in establishing the principal of territorial separation and which prohibited Africans from buying or leasing land outside demarcated reserves (Saunders 1994, 257). As history has proved, this was at great expense to the lives affected by enforced segregation, apartheid's forced removals and post-1994 land redistribution programmes.

The issue of land had been contentious in South Africa since the arrival of whites in the Cape in 1652 (Saunders 1994, 250). This was true in politics of land ownership and also the rendering of land in art. The earliest European artists had recorded the ethnic and geographical diversity from a Eurocentric viewpoint in order to furnish their countries of origin with the peculiarities of the "new" continent. Of little concern was the fact that the Bantu-speaking peoples had inhabited the continent for centuries. A common denominator in landscape art in South Africa is the question of perceived ownership. The positioning of the artist's self within the landscape may divulge a wealth of meaning. As Arnold notes, landscape is not just a phenomenon but in the Postmodern sense also a "text" that may be "read" (Arnold 1996, 40). The history of the landscape in which Bertha lived and painted needs to be examined, as well as the details of her private social sphere, for as Edwards observes: "Art history involves questioning what evidence is, and in what way it is relevant to the interpretation of works of art, as well as using that evidence to make critical judgements" (Edwards 1999, 2).

In Women and Art in South Africa (1996), Arnold surveys the early art history of South Africa. She reveals that before the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, male artists were largely self-employed.

They often gave instruction to young ladies in watercolour or sketching, which was perceived to be as suitable a pastime and accomplishment for middle-class women in South Africa as it was in England. Similarly, women were neither expected to be competitive nor generate income from art. Women artists were numerous and often accomplished, despite the fact that their teachers encouraged conformity and emulation rather than individuality. Women were frequently accredited with less status than they deserved on the basis of their gender. Botanical illustration was an area in which many excelled, but as it was classed as scientific illustration, their work was conveniently overlooked in the search for Fine Art. As in England, watercolour was not given the same status as oil painting and seems to have been regarded by academic painters as a device with which to record observations made *en plein air*, especially before the camera was used for similar purposes (McConkey 1995).

The institutionalisation of South African art started in 1851 in Cape Town where the first Annual Exhibition of Fine Art was held. Subsequently, art exhibitions were held there on a fairly regular basis, until 1871 when these exhibitions travelled to other centres such as Grahamstown, Durban, Port Elizabeth, Johannesburg and Kimberly (Arnold 1996, 9). During this time, women were free to exhibit work, but as Arnold points out, the male critics maintained a superior attitude to women's work by upholding conservative styles and diminishing women's art by their patronising critique and chauvinistic attitude. These exhibitions, like those in England on which these were based, were important social events and catered for a conservative public taste, eschewing anything that smacked of Modernism (Arnold 1996, 10).

A relatively newly established art scene had preceded Bertha's arrival in South Africa. Hillebrand's informative article in the Everard Phenomenon exhibition catalogue discusses this at some length (2000, 67-75). What is established is that the parochial nature of early South Africa extended into the art world. In a largely rural and culturally unsophisticated country, economic interests largely outweighed cultural concerns. This was countered by small groups of people whose attempts to establish a cultural heritage were often thwarted by a lack of public interest and insufficient financing by either the government or wealthy individuals. Art did not warrant significant expenditure by the government and the



establishment of tertiary art schools was delayed until the mid 1850s. The oldest surviving art institution, the Port Elizabeth School of Art (now a department of the Port Elizabeth Technikon), was founded in 1882 and was run by Harry C. Leslie, a licentiate of the Royal College of Art (as it became known in 1896) in London. The lack of amenities and exposure to art exhibitions in South Africa was responsible for the perception that training in Europe was necessary for artists who wished to gain recognition. Therefore only a privileged minority with the financial resources were able to combat the colonial inferiority complex (Hillebrand 2000, 67, 68).

At the turn of the century, the earliest art galleries were established in South Africa. It was hoped that the prestige associated with a gallery would increase the number of visitors to the town and also provide a venue for the education of art students and lay public, and imbue the city with some “refinement”. These collections later served as harbingers of what was considered to be good taste. For these reasons, The Durban Art Gallery (established 1903), the Pietermaritzburg Municipal Collection (established 1910, renamed the Tatham Art Gallery after its founder, in 1963), the Johannesburg Art Gallery (founded 1910 by Lady Florence Phillips) and a nucleus collection in Cape Town (now the South African National Gallery) were established (Hillebrand 1986 11,17). It is significant that the founders of both the Tatham Art Gallery and the Johannesburg Art gallery were eminent society hostesses. These collections were not accurate exemplars of contemporary avant-garde art but tended to be unadventurous selections of Late Victorian paintings, which were conservative, naturalistic and academic in style, with an emphasis on contemporary British art (Hillebrand 2000, 67, 68). In the mimicking of European (and frequently British) norms and values, the often unsophisticated South African public developed a preference for highly finished work that had a moral, narrative content with a tendency to idealise images of rural life, usually sidestepping any sign of poverty or hardship. This tendency is visible in the work of their British contemporaries such as Ellen Clacy’s Old Poacher (1895) and Alice Haver’s Les Blanchisseurs (1880) whose work was purchased by the Liverpool Autumn Exhibitions between 1877 and 1900 (Sellars 1988, 2). Significant here is that these were women artists who, although in the minority, were gaining access to the English art world.

The importance of Roger Fry's groundbreaking and controversial Manet and the Post-Impressionists exhibition in London in 1910 was, of course, completely overshadowed by South Africa's politics. It was not until after World War 1 that many South African artists and the broader public became aware of this radical new attitude to art when new personalities arrived to practise art or teach it (Hillebrand 1986, 66). The Impressionist influence, in diluted form, was grudgingly accepted, its popularity propagated to some extent by Roworth, Naude, and other like-minded artists in Cape Town, as well as at an increasing number of national and private exhibitions held countrywide (Hillebrand 1986, 84, 85).

A more representational and academic style is evident in art depicting the South African War (1899-1902). Artists were usually male, such as R. Caton Woodville, W.H. Coetser and Anton van Wouw, although Emily Hobhouse had significant influence on the making of van Wouw's war memorial in Bloemfontein (Arnold 1996, 31-34). The Voortekker Monument outside Pretoria was erected to commemorate the Afrikaner migration from the Cape, and as van der Watt explains in her discussion of the Voortekker Tapestries (1995, 101-108), the representation of both women and blacks suggests the patriarchy inherent in the Afrikaner culture. Both English and Afrikaans-speaking South African war artists generally presented war from a male viewpoint as heroic, romantic or sentimental in a naturalistic, representational style that was preferred and understood. This manner of representational painting or drawing has frequently been adopted by propaganda art in order that the message is clearly understood by the general public who are generally unsophisticated in modern visual language. The use of caricature was also a favoured manner with which to denigrate the opposition. Amusing and sometimes tragic evidence of this is documented in Hollenbach (1999). The title: Letters from the Boer War: Personal and rare documents around the freedom struggle 1899-1902 (candidate's translation) underscores the racial tension between the two dominant white groups at that time.

Roworth's initial influence in promoting landscape art and knowledge of art gave South African landscape art a welcomed respectability. Roworth's painting followed closely the style of Constable and his Victorian imitators as he was trained at the Slade (Arnold 1996, 11). Roworth's work was popular because of portrayal of the land as conquered by the

British, whereas Pierneef portrayed it as the “promised land” for the Afrikaner. Roworth used his popularity to establish himself as an authority on taste. From his various official positions (such as President of the Cape Town-based SA Society of Arts, Chairman and later Director of the National Gallery; and Professor of Fine Arts at the University of Cape Town) he was in a position to control all national art projects of any significance (Hillebrand 2000, 71). History has proven Roworth to be narrow-minded in his preference for British art, culture and values and short-sighted in his discrediting of modernist style as degenerate. Common to many critics of Modernism was their attack on style rather than subject matter. This was perceived to be an attack on the establishment and the traditions that gave rise to it. These perceptions were challenged when after World War 1, artists returned from studying in Europe, having seen first-hand examples of avant-garde art.

It was only after the turn of the century, when the population became more settled, that art societies were established. These wished to provide a support system for exhibiting artists, loosely based on British models (Hillebrand 2000, 69). Bertha’s Mid-Winter on the Komati River (1910) (Fig. 39) received a gold medal for landscape painting at a national exhibition in Johannesburg that year. Florence Phillips, who organised the exhibition, purchased this painting. In 1922, the miner’s uprising on the Reef threatened the lives and property of the Phillips family and the painting was given to John Mitchell in recognition of his service in providing them with a secure place to stay during this time (Harmsen 2000, 7).

Hillebrand states that by 1930, a national network of annual exhibitions evolved, but it was only after World War 2 that private galleries took over the role of auction houses in providing space for exhibitions and in promoting contemporary art. She suggests that these societies were provincial in character and fiercely competitive and that in the interests of economic gain, they were often sadly indiscriminate in the selection of work. Uncritical admiration by provincial critics of the academic, naturalistic representations by known, academically-trained artists perpetuated the prevalence of less adventurous art (Hillebrand 2000, 69).

Prestige was obtained when the artist’s work was selected for national exhibitions such as the SA Pavilion at the Empire Exhibition in London in 1924 or the Imperial Art Exhibition in

1927 at which Bertha and Sydney Carter represented the Transvaal (Bertha's Opal valley or Looking towards Swaziland c 1920/21 (Fig.70) was exhibited at Cape Town 1922, Royal Academy, London 1923, the Salon Paris, 1924, Imperial Art Exhibition London 1927) (Harmsen 1980, 137 and 225). Bertha's painting Peace of Winter (1909) (Fig. 37) was purchased by the Johannesburg City Council in 1929 (Harmsen 2000, 7).

Exhibitions of this nature were of sufficient interest to have articles published in *The Studio* magazine. Roworth wrote a small article on landscape art in South Africa that first drew Bertha's attention to his neglect of her work in 1917. In his position, Roworth would certainly have been aware of Bertha's national recognition in 1910, but he did not deign to mention her work at all (Harmsen 1980, 56). Roworth had in that same article extolled the virtues of Africa in dramatic and romantic tones where hitherto the dusty Karoo and Highveld vistas had been regarded as too ugly to paint (Hillebrand 2000, 70). Roworth's florid description suggests that he favoured a contemporary British school of thought by Burke that propagated his idea of the sublime in art (Leigh 2000, 79). Roworth was probably aware of the positive economic implications for himself in painting popular dappled Cape Dutch houses, Italianate farmlands and autumnal orchards in a loose Impressionist manner that harked back to Constable and his Victorian imitators. Arnold's observations about Roworth are useful here. She writes:

As an outspoken and influential reactionary force, Roworth dominated the art scene in South Africa for decades. His espousal of traditional British values and his confident pronouncements on the evils of 'modern art' endorsed safe visual formulae. He thought nothing of patronising women artists and once informed his students that the painter Cecil Higgs was 'a little girl from Stellenbosch who can neither paint nor draw....Higgs, then forty-one, was an established artist, albeit a 'modern' one (Arnold 1996, 11).

In the desire to establish a national style that would assist in implementing a new perception of the landscape hitherto regarded as lacking in beauty and "atmosphere" (Merriman in Hillebrand 2000, 71) and validate the new claim to land in South Africa, attempts were made by such as Leo François (1870-1938), President of the Natal Society of Artists and critic for *The Natal Mercury* in Durban, to establish a South African Institute of Art, which would



found a national school of painting. Roworth (as leader of the South African Society of Artists) regarded this as insulting in its implied insinuation that they were incapable of handling national projects (Hillebrand 2000, 71, 72). Goodman argued strongly against establishing academies in any country, as he perceived those who ran them to be “charlatans who control them to their own advantage” and encouraging of mediocrity (Hillebrand 2000, 72). The poet William Plomer in a letter to *The Natal Mercury* (1925), expressed a popular perception which was that the art world was being swamped by pseudo academic, sentimental, poorly conceived and technically weak landscapes (Hillebrand 2000, 72).

In 1938 a group of professional artists rose in defiance of the conservatism and parochialism prevalent in South African art. Founded by Gregoire Boonzaaier and Terence McCaw from the Cape and Walter Battiss in the Transvaal, the New Group’s first exhibition in May 1938 comprised seventeen artists, of whom six were women who took this long-awaited opportunity to claim themselves as professional artists (Arnold 1996, 12). Bertha was not one. At this time she was very involved in farming and church building. There is no evidence to suggest that Bertha knew or was involved in any New Group exhibitions for which invitations were required. Bertha’s apparent anonymity may have been a reason for this lack of involvement. Her work certainly displayed the characteristic modernist style that was a prerequisite for belonging to this alliance. Harmsen suggests that the Everard Group did not join the New Group as they lived so far away from the cities (Harmsen 1980, 195). Bertha’s daughter Ruth studied in Paris at the same time as Maud Sumner (and perhaps Cecil Higgs). Ruth and Sumner never met but only encountered each other’s work after the New Group’s establishment. Harmsen suggests that they (Ruth and Sumner) “...held a mutual respect for each other’s achievements” and that the Everard Group, Higgs and S  n  que and Sumner appear to have been influenced by the Fauve, Expressionist and decorative styles of the Ecole de Paris of the twenties” (Harmsen 1980, 106). Ruth and Rosamund, however, did exhibit with the New Group in 1943 (Harmsen 1980, 188).

Early 20<sup>th</sup> century women artists are discussed in Arnold’s Women and Art in South Africa (1996). Among others Allerly Glossop (1872-1950), Irma Stern (1894-1966) and Maggie Laubser were Bertha’s contemporaries. In trying to assess the reception of Bertha’s work, it



may be pertinent to compare that of these three women. Analysis will show that their work provides an intriguing counterpoint to Bertha in lifestyle and work.

Stern settled in South Africa in 1920. Arnold says: "...this German-trained Jewess shook the Cape out of its artistic complacency by bringing modern art abruptly to public attention in 1922" (Arnold 1996, 11). Arnold suggests that Stern's radical Expressionist style with its aggressive disregard for naturalism, radical shape simplification and strong colour was perceived as confrontational and hostile to traditionally accepted norms and convention in art as well as life. Like Bertha, she did not conform to the stereotype of refined Englishwomen.

Born in Schweizer-Reneke, Stern spent her formative years in Germany and studied art in Berlin and Weimar in Germany. Her work was accepted by the *Freie Sezession* and she was a founder member of the *Novembergruppe*. She travelled widely in South Africa, Zanzibar and the Congo (Zaire), published two books/travelogues, visited Europe regularly, held nearly 100 solo exhibitions in Europe and South Africa, represented South Africa on international exhibitions and participated in numerous group exhibitions in South Africa, and won many prestigious awards including the Regional Award of the Peggy Guggenheim International Art Prize and the Medal of Honour of the *SA Akademie*. Her work is represented in all major public and corporate collections, and her house has become the Irma Stern Museum in Cape Town (Arnold 1996, 156). During her life she was the subject of two books and innumerable articles and reviews and since her death, her life and work have generated a sizeable literature (Arnold 1996, 77).

Arnold suggests that Stern was "a very contradictory woman, desperately needing affirmation but projecting an air of assurance" (Arnold 1996, 77). Privately she was similar to Bertha in that they were emotional, moody and introspective but unlike Bertha she was assertive in her professional life, convinced of the value of her art. Similarly to Bertha, she fought with friends and family while needing their love, and was rude to acquaintances. However, it should be asserted that Stern seems to have been significantly more volatile and less restrained in her speech and general behaviour than Bertha. Unlike Bertha, she took advantage of those in positions of influence, arranged exhibitions, made her own stretchers,

framed her work, packed it and handled the sale of her work.

Stern courted public notoriety and was fully aware of the sensational effect of her work (Arnold 1996, 81). François publicly condemned Stern's work in the 1920s when she exhibited at the Natal Society of Arts in 1924, revealing a startling, if unconscious misogyny. He said while her work was painted "in all sincerity", it was as the "logical spirit of a degenerate spirit in art", and that the composition was "repulsive" or "gross in design" and "utterly devoid of atmosphere". He described the "exaggerated drawing of the figure and face, suggesting almost terrifying sensuality and soul-killing voluptuousness" (Hillebrand 2000, 73).

Bertha disliked self-advertisement, and prized farm life above everything. In 1927, she wrote: "I am used to it [farm life] now and in many ways find it superior to any other life." (Leigh 2000, 90). Edith was usually responsible for organising Bertha's exhibitions, but it is not known whether Bertha made her own frames. She may have packed some of her own work, saying: "...the awful picture is packed too although still wet..." (TAG undated letter no 28 from Skurwekop), yet she also told her sister Edith in no uncertain terms: "...you must get my pictures packed at once and I will wire you if I can't get them on free rail" (TAG undated letter no 30 from Isipingo). Ever mindful of expenses, it would seem.

The Tatham Art Gallery letters contain some receipts from framing companies in Johannesburg, for example an account from A.J. Fitzmaurice, art photographer who charged for mounting and three frames, including "Piece [sic] of Winter" (TAG letter no 21 dated 27.12.1923). Other receipts from print shops itemise colour reproductions of her work including six of Peace of Winter (Fig.37), Banks of the Komati (both c 1910) (Figs. 52 or 56) both at £1.10 each; three of Delville Wood (1926) (unsure which from Figs.103-110) at £1.1- each (TAG undated letter no 137).

Addleson (2001, 14) suggests that there are about 104 of Bertha's works in public and private collections. Everard Haden is presently documenting a number of the Everard Group's work but to date this figure is not available. It is estimated there are at least another two-dozen

paintings, many sketchbooks and unframed canvases of various quality (some were damaged while in storage at Bonnefoi), but this is not confirmed.

Stern has been subject to a two-sided appraisal of her work, with the emphasis either on her work as “Stern as Expressionist” or as containing “the spirit of Africa” (Arnold 1996, 78). As Arnold suggests, these two discourses emphasising style and place overlook the driving force of Stern’s creativity that she suggests was a means of self-discovery and personal revelation (Arnold 1996, 78). Arnold suggests that Stern has also been criticised for patronising attitudes to Africans, as has this research of Bertha. Both women had some understanding of political reality but both their responses were coloured by a romantic nature and absorption of self. As Arnold says: “... to condemn her social immaturity is to do no more than acknowledge the lack of sensitivity that characterised so many of her generation.” That, she adds, is to “hold her art, rather than her, accountable for her intellectual and moral shortcomings and - under the guise of a post-colonial critique - to permit, once again, matters pertaining to race to dominate those interwoven with gender. ” (Arnold 1996, 78).

Unlike Stern, Bertha did not select conventional training schools such as the Slade or the Royal Academy. Herkomer and Olsson’s preference for *plein air* painting and experimental approach were considered atypical. But as Leigh points out, while Herkomer “encouraged individualism and steady work direct from life, [he] dampened all attempts at...cleverness or gymnastics in technique” (Leigh 2000, 81). Despite the illustrious artists and movements in England during Bertha’s training there, she appears to have needed the sense of “raw space” (Leigh, 2000, 85) that South Africa offered before she could free herself completely of the tyranny of the academic style. Her early work in England - prior to her arrival in South Africa - hints at a looser, more Impressionist style. It may be appropriate to point out that it was in South Africa that Bertha first experimented with the use of a palette knife to apply impasto paint in an attempt to express her vision. This significant change from the gentler dabbing to the more sculptural and at times violent scraping and smearing of paint may indicate a similarly changed attitude to and perception of her environment.

This research suggests that Bertha’s lengthy period of study with Herkomer (1849-1914) as a

student, and her earliest *plein air* landscape expeditions, may revise Arnold's idea that Bertha did not relate strongly to English landscape (Arnold 2000, 56). At this time Bertha was grappling with a new medium and is technically less proficient than in her later work. However, Bertha's painting in England between 1922 and 1926 is more "domestic" in subject matter than the paintings made in South Africa. All Bertha's early paintings suggest her enjoyment and response to English rustic life, a popular theme at that time also among recognised artists such as Clausen (1852-1944), Forbes (1857- 1947), Gore (1878-1914), Olsson (1864-1942, whose school Bertha attended), Osborne (1859-1903), Steer (1860-1942) and others (McConkey 1995, 20-30, 99). The Pre-Raphaelites also valorised the theme of English rustic scenery but they dealt mostly with religious subject matter, as a response to a prevailing sense of disenchantment with the effects of industrialisation and the questioning of accepted religion (Leigh 2000, 80).

As a young woman, Bertha responded to the theme of rustic beauty with a certain naivety. The English landscape was where her initial interest in this genre was espoused, but this research suggests that before leaving South Africa, her paintings took on a greater emotional expressiveness. This may have been as a result of her interest in contemporary art in Britain although, as Hillebrand suggests, the reproductions of Post-Impressionist art made available in European magazines were usually of a poor quality. Hillebrand also suggests that Bertha's approach to Modernism was coloured by the writings of Clive Bell (Hillebrand 2000, 73, 74). The gradual but significant change of style or expression in Bertha's work may, however, be attributed to a personal loss of innocence and sentimentality in her vision of the landscape. Bertha's sojourn in France merely seems to have acknowledged that this manner of expression was viable and understood by acclaimed contemporary artists. Her flamboyant and extraordinary paintings at Bruneval testify to a rejection of the classical conformity of style to which she had until recently adhered. It is significant also that at Delville Wood, this research suggests her crisis of faith and Christian doctrine in general seems to have been awakened.

Bertha's early work between 1891 and 1902 describes the countryside in a picturesque, naturalistic way. Many paintings describe children picking berries (or flowers) a winding dirt

road and rolling hills. There is very little of the *angst* apparent in later work. She did, however, paint one work of Men planting cabbages (nd) (Fig.23) that acknowledges the Victorian manner of depicting with nostalgia the honest labour of peasants in the country. True to the middle-class bourgeois tendencies inherent in her youthful perceptions, she did not acknowledge the effects of industrialisation on the landscape. There is a sense of Bertha's empathy with the two men's labour, evident in choosing them as the focal point and their small size against the richly coloured earth and rows of cabbages that await their attention. It is also curious that in later life, Bertha chose not to paint black labourers in similar situations on her farms.

This is one of the few works where Bertha depicts labourers, and the question why she did not pursue this genre has not adequately been answered. Perhaps she did not have the time to watch the farm labourers. This practise of painting out of doors may have been unusual for a young woman in England but not unfamiliar. In South Africa, for example, Maggie Laubser (1886-1973) painted farm labourers. Everard Haden suggests that Bertha loved the English countryside, and that she would often escape there to paint. According to Everard Haden, Bertha had an unpleasant experience during one of these trips, when a naked man appeared nearby. She was not harmed physically. Afterwards Bertha had her large and faithful dog (a St Bernard?) accompany her. Apparently Bertha was extremely reluctant to leave this dog when she left for South Africa (pers com LEH 2001).

Her responses to English landscape during her sojourn there in 1924 are fairly negative and not as eulogistic as her youthful paintings would suggest. However, that her response is strong is clear from extracts from the following letters.

Bertha remarked in a letter to Edith about her perception of England:

...For a tame life this is quite a tasty little place. But oh! It's tame and I'm not...  
(TAG undated letter no 95, from England).

...She [Ruth] will soon tire of this deadly green wet country...I went for a stroll yesterday and felt quite depressed by the monotony and cold wetness. France can't be quite so bad can it? Or is it just as chilly and just as green. There are the



greenest greens. This place is as monotonous as the heart of a cabbage (TAG letter no 63 dated 10.6.1924, from England).

...Isn't England sad in autumn? Quite too sad. All the past ages seem to roll back on her like the returning sea to a tidal river. I always feel haunted when I watch the sea roll back along the desolate mud flats and the same feeling comes over me in early autumn. Perhaps there is some connection (TAG undated letter no 104, from England).

While describing the South African landscape as cruel and harsh, but also beautiful, she wrote:

This farm should prove a fruitful place but we can never be sure of savage old Africa....What a midge man seems in this fierce setting (TAG undated letter no 182, from Badplaas).

It was, on the other hand, a very different German culture and different forces that constituted the German Modernism that moulded Irma Stern's thinking and art. She was affected by the lively debate about the socio-political implications of art and its relationship to contemporary life (Arnold 1996, 78).

Bertha was different from Stern in her devout religiousness. Stern was an iconoclast while Bertha struggled to negotiate the slippery path between revered (British) tradition, gender roles and Christianity. Both women could be fierce and passionate. Religion seems to have been Bertha's source of spirituality and her chief source of restraint while humanist and social concerns of the marginalised people of society seem to have interested Stern. Both women appear to have been self-absorbed to a significant degree.

In appearance Bertha and Stern were very different. In her youth Stern was a short, plump woman, acutely aware of her weight problem even at seventeen, with strong features and frizzy hair. Arnold says: "As she aged she became a massive, overweight figure. People called her 'a character'; they sometimes observed that she was 'masculine'. No one ever said she was beautiful." (Arnold 1996, 81- 83).

Photographs of Bertha reveal an attractive, petite woman with masses of wavy brown hair and intelligent, sparkling eyes; the features probably coveted by many a well-bred English

woman. At the birth of her son Sebastian (her third child) she was the image of a “frontier woman”, broad hat, sensible shoes, sensible clothes and an assertive stance and expression and carrying her child piggy-back style in the custom of the African women on the farm. Bertha’s acculturation of Africa showing one its first signs in this arbitrary domestic snapshot (Fig.136).

At fifty she was handsome, grey hair in a simple *chignon* and fuller figure gave her dignity and composure, the expression in her eyes sadder. Letters from France suggest that she was concerned with the extra weight gain as a result of her damaged knee (TAG undated letter no 105). This knee injury caused her considerable pain and expense. Physical injury or illness and psychological states were often confused. She wrote: “I am feeling depressed in spite of having my leg almost well. Mental things are far more to one than physical.” (TAG letter no 171 dated 30.5.1928 from Bonnefoi).

Bertha suffered from numerous minor and major physical complaints, the details of which she shared with her sister in minute detail. In nearly every letter to Edith she mentioned her current illness, whether it was a chill or toothache, a bad leg or sleeplessness or depression. Frequently after mentioning that she was unwell she made light of it, or told them not to worry unduly, which no doubt had the reverse, and probably desired effect (see TAG letters).

As a diabetic in later life, Bury remarked on her being “easily overwrought”, “highly anxious”, “easily aroused”, “cannot sleep or relax”, “dependent” and “crotchety” (TAG undated letter no 139). A favourite cure-all was either a visit to Lekkerdraai or the seaside (TAG undated letter no 117 and 138). She yearned for the farm when away saying: “I get great attacks of wanting to be at Lekkerdraai looking towards my beloved hills and dear cruel old Twantwani.” (TAG undated letter no 5 from Europe) Bertha was also easily upset by what she perceived as rude behaviour, “... behaved like a madman...” and she “felt quite ill” and she ended up in tears (TAG letter no 16 dated 21.3.1917).

Everard Haden has in her possession a trunk of clothes that belonged to various Everard women. Bertha’s clothes, surprisingly small in size, are simply cut, often hand-made, with a

delight in unusual pattern and texture, the fabric of excellent quality even in its now somewhat tattered state. None of the work-a-day clothes remain. In France she and Bury had a seamstress to make clothes for themselves, and cotton dresses for the girls and remarked on the fact that they “would do” back home in South Africa despite their being less than the height of fashion. Bertha also did a mocking sketch of Bury (not known for her good taste) in her new attire (TAG letters, not documented).

Nothing is known about Bertha’s relationships with men prior to her arrival in Pretoria. Unlike Stern she did not keep a journal or diary. Instead her letters to Edith and her family, faithfully collected by her sister, form the major part of what is known about her private life. The letters contain some quick sketches that depict herself as a small bird, as her nickname was “Birdie”. “Poor birdie” was a frequent refrain (TAG undated letter no 182) as was the word “ought” which suggests her antipathy towards what convention demanded. More often than not, Bertha complied.

Bertha’s response to Ruth and Rosamund’s male admirers reveals that as a mature woman she was insightful and surprisingly modern in her attitude to sexual matters. About Rosamund’s affairs she said: “...aren’t men odd? They expect a woman to be completely devoted awaiting their gracious word. If the word never comes what then?” (TAG letter no173 dated 10.12.1927). In England, Bertha complained of Ruth’s beau saying:

HH [Hubbard] came round to sketch and Ruth sat by him whilst he sat and worked! Just a couple of hours. He may see her on Thursday and perhaps for a few minutes today. How gracious and almost generous of him. Preserve me from hatred (TAG letter no 83 dated 14.9.20/5/6 [writing unclear]).

Bertha’s dislike of this man seems unbounded, which she justifies:

HH [Hubbard] who wished he had the violence and abandon of Gauguin and John [Augustus probably] ... he makes me think of a small sneaky cowardly little school boy envying the aplomb of a masterful bully. And then he is such a disagreeable man, hating women and despising them, and all the time wanting all the good things they have to offer. If I did not feel that Ruth would suffer too much, I have it in my heart to smash that idol so that she can see the rubbish it is built of. I do feel so angry and I hate being where I am obliged to be more or less

amiable to the brute if I meet him (TAG undated letter no 95).

Bertha's relationship with her husband is difficult to analyse with any certainty. She alternatively adored him, signing her letters "heaps of love, your own B" "goodbye dearest of dears, yours as ever, B" (TAG undated letters no 6 and 51) or criticised him saying: "He [Charles] must be roused to think or he will never make a start - I do wish the Everards didn't think they knew all things knowable. Conceit is an awful hindrance." (TAG letter no 47 dated 1917) She did one painting which she called "Charlie's rocks, Skurweberg (nd) (Fig.61). One can only speculate why she implied his ownership in this and no other of the landscapes that were, in fact, in his "possession". It is not known whether or not Bertha wrote letters of a more personal nature to her husband. It may be assumed that most of the letters she wrote were for the family to read.

Like Stern, Bertha was often lonely, but lonely for her children and sister, whereas Stern felt the absence of a lover or soul mate (Arnold 1996, 83). Bertha had Edith as comforter, companion and spiritual guide. Bertha's relationship with her husband appears to have been at times somewhat strained. The suggestion that Stern's creative impetus stemmed from a brittle self-confidence and strong but unrequited sexual desire is plausible (Arnold 1996, 81). What of Bertha? There is no suggestion that she had extramarital affairs. The manner in which she lived her life does not suggest defiance of Christian and moral codes, rather her letters reveal at times an unspoken regret that she had chosen the path of respectable marriage. She wrote with reference to Rosamund's possible marriage: "It seems so awful to think that this choice must be final, I wonder whether it ought to be? I am beginning to wonder about this as I do about many things." (TAG letter no 173 dated 10.12.1927). About Ruth's indecision about the "HH" affair she wrote with reference to the suggestion that they live separately for six months of the year:

It's not a conventional thing to do but ought to be feasible. Rod told Ruth he thought it a good plan because then married people remained fond of each other and did not quarrel. I am sure it is best for all people to be separate sometimes. One would be glad if one could be separated from oneself sometimes. If only it were possible! (TAG undated letter no 172 from France).



Bertha's expectations of a happy reunion with Charles after their four-year stay in Europe were smashed. They had drifted too far apart. The despair that followed her homecoming, the weeping letters to her sister and favoured child Ruth, have an ardency and desire for physical contact which points to the very deep sense of her own loss. She wrote to Ruth:

How often I ascend those unending stairs! How often I ran upon the studio door (note I pass the den!) And then come hurry... feet and shriek of joy from my Ruth as she crushes me nearly to death with those long arms. When, when, shall I see you? One part is agony of longing but I must not dwell upon that but rather inject myself with the anaesthetic of present activities and just wait and wait (TAG undated letter no 172).

The sense of deep space and distance that is often present in Bertha's work may reveal this longing for unfulfilled physical contact. The "anaesthetic of present activities" seems to be a clue to the fact that her involvement in physical and manual labour on the farms and missionary work were primarily that. Her painting expeditions enabled her to remove herself from that deadening drudgery, to allow herself to experience the space, the magnitude and the rawness of being alone with her self, her thoughts and perceptions. Without the "anaesthetic", it is small wonder that these expeditions resulted in depression and illness.

It is also worth noting that on occasion when she and Ruth painted together, Bertha's work appears quite different from those painted alone. Perhaps it was not just stylistic changes with which she was experimenting, but also a different perception of space. Compare, for example, Looking towards Swaziland (1920/1) (Fig. 70) and Lekkerdraai 1 (c 1934/5) (Fig. 115). It is not clear whether Ruth actually accompanied Bertha during the painting of the latter but her influence is visible in the broader treatment of shape and colour. The colour in the former is remarkably fresher, oilier and expressive, with little indication of detail or differing texture. There is a much sharper sense of distance, the eye skimming the rocky precipice in the foreground, high across and over the receding landscape towards a distant thundercloud centrally placed on the horizon. Lekkerdraai 1 (Fig. 115) has a much more lethargic, quieter mood because of the meandering river; the sheltering backs of the mountains and the presence of shrubs and trees en route. The colours are also far more sedate, mostly shades of brownish earth colours enlivened by a contrasting blue. A small



orange speck centrally placed creates a focal point among the predominant greens. Looking towards Swaziland (Fig.70) also relies to a certain extent on a bright orange strip of road in the centre but its removal does not detract so radically from the overall effect.

Bertha was acutely aware of the space between her and Edith. She wrote:

...this being in such widely distant continents tries me dreadfully. It's just possible for the young but not bearable for you and me. Perhaps something will happen and we shall be allowed to be together. We must not fret. I shall never be happy if you are a long way off...scarcely...[illegible]...if you are not in the same place. You have meant so much to me and as age creeps on more... (TAG undated letter no 104).

It is not surprising that deep space features so markedly in most of her work, whether on a small or large scale. Good examples of this ability may be seen in her small paintings, for example, Ploughed land, Normandy (1925) (Fig.92) and Winterveld with cloud and shadow also known as Yellow and pink hillside and cloud (nd) (Fig.122).

Bertha's preoccupation with spirituality is perhaps more akin to Maggie Laubser's work, in that she too hoped to convey immanence through landscape. Laubser said she missed the spaces of the South African landscape. Unlike Bertha, this sense of space gave her "a free and abandoned feeling. It gives me vision and therefore in my work I can never be bound to the restriction of photographic impressions." (Arnold 1996, 59, 60). Bertha felt overawed by South Africa's hugeness (TAG undated letter no 182). Bertha believed that landscape painting could convey "an inward spirit which connects itself immediately with something felt to be divine" (from Bertha's article on Modern Art in the Common Room Magazine, produced by the Natal Art School published between 1925-1931, see in Harmsen 1980, 179). This aspect of Bertha's work is covered more fully in Chapter 4 on faith and mission work.

The South African-born artist Maggie Laubser's (1886-1973) work therefore bears a brief comparison. Like Stern and Bertha, she helped to invigorate South African landscape painting by not merely representing naturalistic equivalents of the landscape, but by transforming the landscape using a modernist vocabulary to express their own feelings

(Arnold 1996, 56). Laubser studied briefly under Roworth in Cape Town, registered at the Slade, where she studied with Henry Tonks, Walter Russell and Ambrose McEvoy. She visited Belgium in 1919, worked in Italy briefly, spent two important years in Germany and returned to South Africa in 1924, where she settled permanently. Laubser exhibited extensively and gained numerous awards. Her work is represented in major collections throughout South Africa (Arnold 1996, 153).

Like Stern she was the recipient of harsh criticism. The critic Bernard Lewis asked: "Is there any normal, sane being in all South Africa who is able to appreciate as a work of art, to enjoy as a picture... the one sent [to a 1931 exhibition] by Maggie Laubser?" (Arnold 1996, 12).

Laubser adopted the Christian Scientist religion while studying in Europe and it exerted strong influence on her philosophy of life and art. Combined with her exposure to European Modernism, her work changed from being naturalistic to being "...boldly non-descriptive.... simplifying and stylising her forms and strengthening her palette with non-local colours."

(Arnold 1996, 59) Arnold argues that Laubser used landscape and the figures of labourers to convey spiritual beliefs (rather than social realities) that were based on natural motifs but were largely painted in the studio. Laubser's paintings represent pictorial rather than physical space, using "figures [to] identify the landscape and provide local content" (Arnold 1996, 60). Bertha's inclusion of figures was arguably, primarily for narrative detail or for purposes of indicating scale and they often seem oddly out of place in the overall composition.

Initially seen as problematic, Laubser's work became a popular vehicle for expressing an optimistic, idyllic view of South Africa's rural life (Arnold 1996, 60). This was a fallacy, as history has revealed. Smut's Native Areas Act of 1923, enforced by the pass laws of 1938, imposed a system of segregation and influx control on the African population so that blacks would be kept outside white towns and ensure a steady supply of labour to white farms (Saunders 1994, 142).

Unlike Bertha and Stern, Laubser painted many self-portraits. Arnold (1996) discusses these

in detail, but it appears that Laubser's confident, decorative and expressive style admits none of the angst that she may have been feeling at forty when she was struggling to adjust to life in South Africa (Arnold 1996, 123). One reason why Bertha did not choose to paint self-portraits is that it may have been considered vain or that she did not feel that the way she looked had any bearing on how she felt. This would also sustain the argument that her landscapes were metaphors for herself, and a reason why, when feeling very disheartened, she considered destroying her work. In 1927 she said: "I so detest my work some days that I could burn it, and yet I don't. So much of me has gone into the doing that I don't think I ought to be the one to do that. It is too much like suicide." (Harmsen 1980, 139).

Alice Emma Harriet Glossop, known as Allerly or Joe (1872-1955) was an acquaintance of Bertha's who visited Bonnefoi on occasion. Bertha did not approve of Glossop's work. Harmsen suggests that Bertha blamed Glossop's advice for the failure of Bertha's tondo Banks of the Komati (nd) (Fig.56). Glossop had "presumed to advise" (Harmsen 1980, 48). Perhaps a reason for her dislike of Glossop, as her work appears to be of a subject (cattle and landscape) and style (strongly coloured impressionistic) to which Bertha could respond, was her unusual and idiosyncratic life-style of which Bertha may not have approved. Arnold points out that Glossop smoked, wore a pith helmet, tie and jacket, and travelled around the country in a wagon (Arnold 1996, 10). Glossop studied in England at the Slade and the Westminster School of art, she arrived in Cape Town in 1900 and was active in the Cape and Natal art circles. She travelled extensively throughout South Africa, participated in group exhibitions and is represented in public collections (Arnold 1996, 152). Glossop did not rely entirely on her art for a living, like Bertha, she combined it with farming.

From the perspective of a white Afrikaner male one may glimpse at a different discourse. In the 1930s, Afrikaans-speaking artists such as J.H. Pierneef supported a patriotic landscape tradition but were very opposed to anything imperialistic. For them the harshness of the landscape became instead a powerful visual metaphor for loyalty to Africa rather than Europe. As a vehement supporter of Afrikaans nationalism that rejected alien influences such as British Imperialism, Pierneef's preferred subject matter was that which depicted the Afrikaner as heroic. He found the English's sense of cultural superiority both hostile and

irritating. Pierneef's thinly disguised public attack on the British art establishment in 1926 is evident in his appeal for artistic originality. He said:

In South Africa we possess a virgin soil and surroundings with inexhaustible material if we could only go back to nature and live at first hand. Why must we go on copying the past, doing things that have been done before and which to-day are only worth storing in museums, which after all are nothing more than coffins? Each country and each period has its own style, and why cannot we create a true South African one?...They (Holland) have broken with tradition...they have created a new thought about art, and have done away with fossilized top-hat professors (Pierneef in Hillebrand 2000, 72).

Pierneef's political ideology deeply offended the art establishment, and many English-speaking South Africans besides. His offensive racist remarks often caused a furore. For example, he complained that: "South Africa House [in London] was filled with the work of Jewish artists who had only been in South Africa a short time and had not even smelt a "*mis*" (dung) fire. The fault of the whole matter was that Sir Herbert Baker was in charge of the arrangements, and he wished to give everything as much of an imperial air as possible." (Hillebrand 2000, 76).

Pierneef had through aggressive self-publicity made himself one of the most admired artists in South Africa and, increasingly, one of the most imitated. This is highly ironic as his style was modernist in certain ways - something that was far more likely to offend the art establishment than radical politics (Hillebrand 2000, 73).

Within the South African artistic fraternity there were opposing views about Modernism in art. While Pierneef idolised van Gogh, whom he referred to as "the great revolutionist, a Christ in art...who painted like a hungry lion devouring a fresh kill" François regarded van Gogh as "a charlatan", and those who followed him as "Bolshevists" (Hillebrand 2000,73). Further comparison between Pierneef and Bertha will be made in Chapter 7 in order to observe different uses of landscape as metaphor.

The protagonists of the British school of art in South Africa, such as Roworth and W.G. Wiles (1875-1966) followed the general tenets of Neo-Classical romanticism. While



Roworth had “grudging respect for African scenery”, he rejected “modern” art out of hand as decadent. Hillebrand (2000) says Roworth “publicly declared his support for Hitler’s purging of this kind of art in a lecture entitled ‘French art: a study in downfall’”. He said:

...degeneracy in art eventually means degeneracy in the whole life of a nation; that a people who weakly allow themselves to be misled by the ballyhoo of modern art and had not the moral courage to cleanse their art and their country from this vile corruption were ripe for national downfall (Hillebrand 2000,73).

During the period 1922-1926, Bertha and her family were in Europe studying art informally and exhibiting their work. They attended exhibitions of contemporary art, and Ruth has recorded her mother’s preference for van Gogh, as well as Marquet, Matisse and Braque (Harmsen 1980, 96). Hillebrand confirms that Bertha’s approach to Modernism was coloured by the writings of Clive Bell and the work of the British avant-garde. In her quotation from Bertha’s article in the Durban School of Art’s publication in 1927, The Common Room Magazine, one notes that Bertha “credits the recent World War for the breaking down of redundant ideals and the emancipation of art. Bertha is also critical of Victorian painting, and by implication, of South African artists who clung to Victorian values” (Hillebrand 2000, 74). Bertha wrote:

...ought one not to be able, even without special training, to appreciate a picture for its beauty. I answer, no! For modern standards of, or perhaps it would be better to say, outlooks on, beauty have changed, or widened, so much, that Mr Clive Bell, some years ago now, electrified us by saying that we ought to get a new word for it and himself substituted “significant”. For just as we may imagine an Elizabethan sailor, accustomed to the grace of his sailing ship, totally unable to admire the beauty of a modern man-of-war, so unable are many of us to admire the new kind of beauty to be found in much modern art. Artists of to-day no longer admire...and seldom wish to record picturesque or delicate, especially sentimentally delicate, or pretty, form and colour in the way their ancestors did, they find more of what they consider to be beauty or significance in what would certainly a generation ago have been termed ugliness (Hillebrand 2000,74).

By the time the Everard family had returned from Europe in 1926, “the initial hysteria concerning modern painting had subsided into cautious tolerance” (Hillebrand 2000, 74), and Expressionism was already an established fact in South African painting by 1924 although Laubser, Stern and Kibel (1903-1938) were considered to be *enfants terribles* of this



“degenerate” art style (Berman 1970, 8,9). The Everards, and other recently returned artists, were credited with some acquired integrity as a direct result of having studied overseas. Hillebrand also points out the proliferation of “isms” during the first half of the twentieth century, in an attempt by the artists themselves to identify the various new styles. It is suggested that as the early twentieth century South African professional artistic practice was in its infancy, pioneers in this field were overshadowed by a handful of artists jealously guarding their respective domains and outdated working methods. The various misguided attempts to create a “national school” by exploiting local subject matter created confusion for artists and their viewing public alike. When Modernism arose to provide the potential freedom to create a new style, it was poorly received by an ungenerous, culturally isolated and old-fashioned British dominion (Hillebrand 2000, 74).

The Everard’s relatively isolated existence from the major urban centres was an important reason for their ability to focus on their private artistic ambitions, but also why they were largely overlooked by the art world. Hillebrand remarks on the fact that while the New Group and Walter Battiss were beginning to succeed in the promotion of modern art in the late 1960s, the Everard Group seemed to have slipped into obscurity. She posits that the reason for this may have been the dismissing of all but a select few of the early modernists as academic or of historical value only (Hillebrand 2000, 75).

This research suggests that some of Bertha’s most significant work was painted in South Africa because her physical, emotional, and spiritual involvement was grounded there. Moustakas (1990) suggests that in order to respond to something one should undergo:

... a process of internal research through which one discovers the nature and meaning of experience and develop[s] procedures for further investigation and analysis. At the same time the researcher experiences growing self-awareness and self-knowledge. The self of the researcher is present throughout the process (Moustakas 1990, 10).

He goes on to quote a poem by Moffit on this process, which suggests that all the senses should be evoked when engaged in looking at a specific thing, in order for the experience to be complete (Moustakas 1990, 12).

That Bertha immersed herself physically and emotionally in the landscape is evident in her letters. She was rarely indifferent. Her life seems to have consisted of a series of annoying, yet frequently self-imposed, domestic duties and the preparation of, or seeking for a landscape through which she could best express herself. As has been suggested earlier in this chapter, Bertha's involvement with family, farming, missionary work and domestic chores may have been a form of "anaesthetic" to dull the pain caused by the absence of her closest family. It was during her painting that Bertha appears to have experienced life most keenly. Levy (1991, 9) argues that the domestic is political, not just because "sweeping floors and having babies is unpaid labour", but because it is represented as the normal and the natural thing to do. (Levy 1991, 9).

The discourses that informed Bertha's mode of being also assured the hegemony of white rule in early South Africa. In other words the "common sense" that prevailed determined the right and wrong ways of being human, assured the power of the dominant group (English-speaking whites) with which Bertha clearly identified initially. Levy suggests that this ability to articulate ruling definitions of the "natural", involves a self-conscious awareness of itself as a class and consensus among itself and its subordinate groups in order to represent its specific interests as natural, necessary and right, if not always desirable for everyone (Levy 1991, 12). By "knowing" whom she was, and identifying with those systems of power, Bertha established an understanding of what she was not, i.e. the "other" cultures and races in South Africa. Bertha's initial identification with, and her later loss of identification with England as "home" suggests ambivalence with the discourses inherent in British Imperialism.

Bertha was an avid, and critical reader. Everard Haden could not specify what Bertha's library comprised but suggests that she read "Scott, etc" (pers com LEH 2001). So it has been difficult to establish exactly what she read apart from the Bible, Euripides, *Iphigenia in Tauris* (TAG undated letter no 64), Carpenter, Ellis, Fry, Bell, and various art magazines (Arnold 2000, 61).

With her proclivity to acute self-consciousness and poor self-esteem, artistically speaking,

perhaps landscape painting was an unconscious strategy to avoid, where possible, the influences of the restrictive and often sexist art world.

Bertha does not seem to have conformed in any significant way to a conventional marriage; the reasons for this are unclear. While in Cape Town in 1921 she tried, unsuccessfully, to establish an art school based on Herkomer's model (Harmsen 1980, 74). The fact she was prepared to tackle a long-term project like this while her husband lived hundreds of kilometres away in the Eastern Transvaal (now Mpumalanga), suggests some desire to be separate from him. This is substantiated by her opinions about her daughter's proposed marriage to "HH" (TAG letter no 172). Her remarks on Carpenter's observations on sex are revealing. In 1928 Bertha said of Carpenter that while she agreed with him in some matters pertaining to sex and marriage, she felt he over-emphasised sexual enjoyment. Bertha felt that sex was a "terrible nuisance" and that life-long faithfulness to one partner "a deadly sin" because it was a "deadly lie". She also expressed regret at not having read books on these matters earlier in her life, suggesting some dissatisfaction perhaps with decisions she had made (Arnold 2000, 62).

As a white woman, Bertha was entitled to vote after 1930 (Saunders 1994, 263). In a letter to Edith, she explained one occasion where she missed an opportunity to vote: "I could have had a vote. I did not know I was entitled to one until the very last day. I am sorry to have missed the chance, but really could not have gone out I had a horrid sort of chill which laid me low." (TAG undated letter no 4). She had strong feelings about World War 1. She expressed anti-war sentiments and acknowledged that it made her feel "very bewildered" (TAG undated letter no 44). She felt compelled to do something about it, remarking on the efforts to raise money for the war effort by people in Durban (TAG undated letter no 30). Bertha said in a letter to Edith that she had tried to:

...make Charlie offer his services to the country in some capacity or other. Charlie was very insulting to me but he was angry and disconcerted so I don't complain. I wish we women could do more. Ought I give up my family and do war work. Let you have some of my family and me go East somewhere where there is need? Do tell me (TAG letter no 13 dated 17.4. 1917).

This letter suggests that Charles did not feel her compulsion to defend the Empire. The rashness of her expressed desire to “go East” while leaving her children under Edith’s care also suggests a desire for separation, a need for independence. The decision for the family’s extended stay in Europe was apparently hastily made. Harmsen (1980, 80) suggests that her chief reason may have been due to the poor reception of her work and the need for better education for Ruth, but this research suggests that it may well have been for more personal reasons that she needed distance, although this would perhaps not be acknowledged by the family. Likewise, when pressed about Charles’ financial involvement in Bertha’s travels and life, Everard Haden’s response was “no comment, we never spoke about money”. Later commenting on the short fiscal leash (TAG undated letters no 6 and 24) on which Charles appeared to keep Bertha, she said: “No, he [Charles] showed maturity and I am sure he would not have tried to stop their travels.” (LEH pers com 2001).

According to the information available there are about thirteen works, and a number of pencil sketches by Bertha of varying size done before leaving for South Africa. Leigh (2000, 93) points out that Bertha produced about twenty large major works and many smaller ones between 1910-1922. In Europe she painted about twenty-five paintings and some smaller sketches in oil. On returning to South Africa she completed about nine works of which about five were large (Harmsen 1980, 225-226). When compared to Stern, this is a relatively small output. Unlike Stern, Bertha had more pressing concerns. The reasons for this have been suggested previously, but what is remarkable is her consistent adherence to her principles in both art and life.

Despite the acclaim that she received for Mid-Winter on the Komati (1910) (Fig. 39) she did not adhere to this winning formula. Before leaving for Europe, her work had changed remarkably from that of naturalistic representation to greater expressionism. Her work did not find favour among all but a few in South Africa, and sales were poor. In a letter to Edith, she said: “Why do you ask me to paint pictures if you know the world doesn’t want them? You who have nowhere to hang them. Silly old Edie. Cinemas and cars are what the world wants why paint pictures?” (TAG undated letter no 79). She could not have accumulated sufficient money from sales to support her family in Europe for such an extended period. It



would appear that Bury and Edith did contribute to some extent. Bury bought the house in Kimpton, Hertfordshire and Edith either lent or gave her money (Harmsen 1980, 82 and TAG letter no 24; neither sources are clear). Bertha was disheartened by the critics' poor reception on her return to South Africa. The slow acceptance of her work came too late. She never believed in her success. As Leigh (2000, 93) points out, Bertha could not "find the forms that would express the intense love for that which she saw in her vision". In 1956, Bertha acknowledges a reason for her inability to begin painting again in a letter:

...but the greatest obstacle is 'fear' lest I should be unable to express the intense emotion that this kind of light engenders in me...at sunset the colours and lines are inexpressibly lovely, powerful, sublime. A sort of ecstasy of stillness after a storm, a miracle of spiritual colour (Leigh 2000, 93).

The words: fear, intense, inexpressible, powerful, sublime, ecstasy and spiritual suggest Bertha's summing up of many of her lifetime's experiences. The "savage old Africa" which had both inspired and intimidated her was the source of her creativity. Although her mature works are not literal transcriptions of the natural world, the sense of scale and space is decidedly African. The vast distance between her and her family, between her "self" and "other" was navigated by the Eurocentric compass upon which she was forced to rely. Her questioning of Christian faith and gender roles did not always provide her with suitable means of negotiating this new landscape, but within these narrow waters she trawled for meaning. Her work, in its many manifestations, provides us with example of the attempts of one woman to find a path to greater understanding of a fractured landscape.



## **CHAPTER 7: Landscape as metaphor: The interpretation of selected works**

Bertha's decision and desire to paint was informed by the historical, political and social discourses that intersected, overlapped and changed during her life. Her response to their enabling or constraining effects is what constitutes the person, the subject for this research. Of these, the Late Victorian and early South African historical, political and cultural discourses are probably the most significant. Within these, a common point of intersection is that of gender, class and race. This research proposes that Bertha's selection of landscape as metaphor was to a degree informed by these discourses.

Accomplishment, rather than professional excellence, in the arts was encouraged in women from the middle and upper classes in the Late Victorian age. This was one of the few options available and deemed a suitable occupation for "young ladies", and one that could be pursued within the domestic environment (Irwin in Campbell Orr 1995, 149-151).

A reason for Bertha's choice of landscape as her medium of expression - in lieu, say, of still life, portraiture or history painting - may be that landscape was the preferred subject of her teachers in England. The widespread influence of Constable, Turner, Wordsworth, Rousseau and Ruskin, who advocated this subject in their painting, poetry and prose is well known.

Excluded largely from the male dominated "history painting" and figure painting because of their sex, women in England gravitated towards these "lesser" pursuits. Landscape was, however, an area where it was possible to meet men on equal terms. In England, the Romantic Realists (Constable and Turner), the English Impressionists (Steer, Sargent, Osborne), and later the Bloomsbury group all painted landscape, although not exclusively. Landscape had changed from the picturesque, the romantic, the dramatic, and the "objective" to the expressive. All these influences may be seen in Bertha's work, although the French Impressionists and Post-Impressionists also played a role in her work.

Bertha's training and experience of teaching at schools in England facilitated her employment in South Africa, where art teachers were scarce. She had learned advanced pedagogical methods from her studies and teaching practice at some of the foremost schools

in England (Harmsen 1980). This, with the perception that anything outside South Africa was better in some way, would have made her eminently employable in the cultural desert of this country at that time.

The manner in which she perhaps somewhat recklessly married a man some twenty years her senior after a very brief courtship, is startling, considering her ideas (albeit that they were expressed after the fact) on the subject of marriage. This contradiction of her Victorian upbringing that called for restraint in such matters may be ascribed to her wish for a family and the possibility of being in a position to pursue her desire to paint. Ignoring Edith's advice upon which she had previously been dependent, Bertha plunged herself into a new adventure, that of marriage and motherhood. Edith's preconceived ideas about Charles's unsuitability was based no doubt on his occupation as storeowner. Always the moral guide to Bertha's at times unorthodox behaviour, Edith was quoted as saying that "we like a little 'stiffness', or let us call it restraint, rather, in art as in life" (Harmsen 1980, 65).

It may be significant that Bertha gave Charles a painting (The Bonnefoi store, Christmas 1902) (Fig.32), prior to their marriage, identifying herself and manner of self-expression. The subject, his store, symbolised his status and her acknowledgement of it. This may reveal her recognition of his ownership and her future attachment to it. Bertha accepted the status that a life with Charles offered. It freed her from the constraints of teaching, and ostensibly left her free to pursue art with the means to do so. With the help of black labourers and domestic workers who were employed to cook, clean and work the fields, she was able to find the time and energy to paint. In a letter to Edith, she explained that she had insisted on employing a new cook at some expense (TAG letter no 170 dated 28.1.1928). Significant also is the fact that after this letter, she produced far fewer works than the period preceding her stay in Europe. However, despite this she was endlessly critical of those in her employ. Aware of her status and determined to maintain it, she subjected her employees, black and white, to her indomitable will to improve upon their "sadly lacking" ability.

To this end, marriage to Charles was a means of converting from an employee to an employer, with the significant social and material benefits associated with this. It was easier

for her to play the part of a respectable white, married, Anglican, English-speaking woman, than it would have been as a single woman or spinster, governess or teacher with little or reduced means. Likewise, her dismissal of the governesses and other staff in her employ suggests that she exercised this authority, and in doing so, reasserted her claim to power.

Figure in a landscape (nd) (c. 1903) (Fig.33) was an Anglicised version of a local scene that seems to underscore her status as “*uitlander*” in settler terms, or “difference” (Englishness), and is also an attempt to come to terms with the new landscape. Bertha applied her technical knowledge and training in what may be described as a clichéd manner, which is not unlike Koestler’s description of a clichéd or automatised verbal response (Koestler 1964, 598). Koestler implies that our use of verbal and written language is often more reliant on clichés or automatic responses which are adopted during the formation and development of language in youth. This may also be true of visual language, where mannerisms and modes of expression in style are taught or absorbed when in the process of painting or drawing, or through the observation of other artists’ work.

In Bertha’s case, the influence of Herkomer and Olsson’s styles are visible. During the rise of a form of social realism in the Late Victorian era, Herkomer was employed as a graphic artist by the *Graphic* weekly news magazine that was established in 1869. In this magazine topical events were illustrated with hastily reproduced wood engravings and its artists were encouraged to draw material from ordinary life. The black-and-white illustrations were often enlarged and worked up into oil paintings and shown at the Royal Academy Summer Exhibitions. Herkomer’s social awareness and empathy for the destitute is evident in his painting entitled, Hard Times, 1885 (1885) that depicts a destitute family at a roadside. Their depiction may be compared to the biblical reference to the flight into Egypt. He frequently depicted minority communities such as gypsies, Jews and Italian immigrants, reflecting his childhood as a German immigrant in the USA and later in Britain (Treuerherz, 1993, 180-184). The detailed and naturalistic representations in Bertha’s early prints may be as a result of Herkomer’s influence, although there is little evidence of social awareness other than in Men planting cabbages (nd) (Fig. 23).

Although Olsson (1864-1942) had no formal training, he began painting in London and on various journeys abroad, and then moved to St Ives in 1896 where he developed a reputation as a painter of landscapes and stormy or moonlit seascapes, done in a fairly loosely-handled manner. He became a member of the St Ives Art Club, where he gave instruction in painting. He exhibited widely in many London galleries and art societies abroad and regularly at the Royal Academy, where he became a member in 1920. Olsson's small oil studies are Impressionistic and have been compared to Monet's paintings. However, in his studio paintings, this more spontaneous and dramatic technique was subdued. Olsson was particularly interested in moonlit scenes which have been described as possessing: "...a moment of intense beauty...everything is enveloped in a tender afterglow: there are no strong contrasts of tone. The mystery and charm is one of colour only: hence its attraction for the artist." (Stokes in McConkey 1995, 169). Bertha's frequent painting of moonlit scenes is documented in Harmsen (1980).

Olsson's attraction to a more Impressionistic style was typical of many Edwardian artists. McConkey (1995) discusses the different attitudes to *plein air* painting in France and England in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Olsson may well have been influenced by this way of thinking. The avant-garde French schools advocated the study of Spanish painting, especially the work of Velasquez. This method encouraged light sketching in charcoal, followed by a process of blocking-in in broad areas, starting with the background and working over the whole surface. Modulation was discouraged and the brush marks were to be left visible. While this method was criticised for its apparent neglect of drawing, it did not reject verisimilitude; it did, however, remove "layers of mystification; the public was denied *tableau vivant* verisimilitude; and autonomous paint marks began to stand for themselves" (McConkey 1995, 20).

What appears to separate the English and French Impressionists is the former's adherence to a romanticised and sometimes sentimental representation of the beautiful or picturesque, or rustic naturalism in their subject matter (McConkey 1995, 21). The Paris schools or *ateliers* were acknowledged by many artists and critics as superior and many young artists attended art lessons hoping to imbibe not only artistic influences but also enjoy the less restrictive



Bohemian culture there. Bertha may have held this perception when she decided to send Ruth to a Paris *atelier* to study. The weather in France was generally more conducive to working out of doors than in England, and large paintings could be completed there without having to rely on suitable studio space (McConkey 1995, 22-25). In England, Forbes declared that the success of a landscape painting relied on a certain amount of discomfort during its execution (McConkey 1995, 27). Bertha's method of *plein air* painting and her descriptions of the hardships endured may well be attributed to this perception.

It may be pertinent to the understanding of Bertha's metaphors to consider briefly some theoretical positions on language and knowledge. Conventional mannerisms or automated response was something with which Bertha appears to have struggled in her painting. In trying to find a personal visual vocabulary to "name" the things which she saw in an attempt to describe not only her visual perceptions, she expressed a personal or "inner discourse" (Koestler 1964, 601). Language, as Foucault suggests, is never without its latent systems of power (McHoul and Grace, 1993). According to McHoul and Grace, Foucault thinks of discourse (or discourses) in terms of bodies of knowledge. His use of the concept moves it away from something to do with language (in the sense of a linguistic system or grammar) and closer towards the concept of discipline (in the sense of scholarly disciplines such as science, medicine, psychiatry, sociology and as the institutions of social control such as prisons, schools, hospitals and confessionals). Foucault's idea of discourse shows the historically specific relations between disciplines, defined as bodies of knowledge, and the disciplinary practises such as forms of social control and social possibility. To Foucault, the term discourse refers not to language or social interaction but to relatively well-bounded areas of social knowledge. Foucault moves the emphasis away from language being simply a technical accomplishment, linguistic or interactional (McHoul and Grace 1989, 26-36). In other words, language itself is a mode of social control whereby what we may and can say is governed by what constitutes the accepted discourses.

In Bertha's case, the language she spoke was English. The language itself was part of the cultural discourse that embodied the British Imperialist ideology. The Anglo Boer War, also known as the South African War (1899-1902) and Anglo Zulu War (1879) may be used as an



example of this site of struggle between “other” cultures. Bertha’s experience of this was far less dramatic but no less contentious. Her perception appears to have been that English was a culturally superior language, the chosen method of instruction for her own children and those of the farmworkers and their children. However, Bertha was determined that her children should be conversant in the indigenous language (TAG undated letter no 116).

English-speaking settlers in South Africa initially formed a small minority of the white population, a socially and politically divided group, ill-equipped to survive as successful agricultural smallholders. The primary reason for the English colonial authority’s support of settlers was to secure a cheap defence of the eastern frontier against the Xhosa. Many English settlers, however, abandoned their small farms to settle in towns, where they became involved in a variety of commercial activities. Others who remained on the land soon prospered in wool, sugar, wheat, maize and wine production (Saunders 1994, 110-111).

In Natal, most of the white population was English-speaking, and its preponderance secured after the annexation of Natal by the British in 1843. Thereafter, an influx of English and Scottish immigrants to Durban settled as farmers in the surrounding areas. Many were attracted by the discovery of gold and diamonds in the interior, which caused considerable tension in the Transvaal, particularly after the Jameson Raid in 1895. After Union, Afrikaners outnumbered English speakers despite continual immigration by English speakers before 1948, thus restricting their political influence. Despite their political weakness, they continued to dominate commerce, business, industry and banking. English was also the principal language in Bloemfontein and Pretoria until Afrikaners began to urbanise between the two world wars (Saunders 1994, 112).

Bertha’s sense of nationalism was at first determinedly, and quite understandably, British. After returning from Europe in 1926, this appeared less certain. She had left South Africa feeling disillusioned with what she perceived as its parochial and uncultured climate. She complained of England’s dreariness and despised the class-consciousness of the middle classes. In France she seems to have delighted in the cultural, intellectual and artistic environment, while speaking disparagingly of the French and their “unusual” habits.

Artistically she produced some of her most valuable work. Always, she longed for the quiet open veld of her “home” on the farm, yet when she returned to Bonnefoi, she was disappointed by her inability to feel at home again. Her return was marred by a strained marital relationship, absence from her children and sister, shock at the less servile behaviour of the “natives”, and her crisis in religious faith. For some years, she was unable to paint at all. Much had happened in her absence and, undoubtedly, her experiences abroad had affected her perceptions and expectations of “home”. It is significant that during her sojourn in Europe she acknowledged that she no longer considered England to be “home” (TAG undated letter no 112 and Harmsen 1980, 90,131).

Added to the Victorian era and its imperialistic subtexts were the not inconsiderable impulses of religion, nationalism and race relations in settler ideologies in South Africa.

Land and landscape has long been an area of heated dispute in South Africa. It may therefore be pertinent to investigate the ideologies traditionally associated with rendering landscape in South Africa. This may reveal why Bertha pursued landscape, either in compliance with or rejection of these ideologies. Everard Haden (2000, 40) states that farming concerns were the chief topics of conversation at Bonnefoi; no mention is made of politics. It is a curious but revealing anomaly, as in South Africa the issue of land and agricultural production was contentious and the cause of bloodshed and political debate since the first settlers arrived.

An opinionated and intelligent woman, Bertha must have been aware of some if not all, political occurrences. It is unlikely that she was aware of the indigenous peoples’ concept of land ownership, as this information was not widely published nor acknowledged. However, the Voortrekkers’ migration inland from the Cape in the mid 1830s and the many related land disputes between black and white inhabitants as well as between white settlers is well documented. National holidays and religious commemorations (often related) were invariably about the acquisition of land and power (re) distribution. For example, the Battle of Blood River (1888) that became “Day of the Vow” (or “Covenant”) that was celebrated annually on the 16<sup>th</sup> December. Similarly, the work of Emily Hobhouse (1860-1926) as a compassionate and philanthropic British woman must have drawn Bertha’s attention to the

plight of the Afrikaner women during the relatively recent South African War (1899-1902).

Significant to this research is the markedly different view of Afrikaner national identity; a discourse which, when investigated, may suggest a clearer understanding of Bertha's compliance with or appropriation of this ideology of identification with the land in her work.

MacGregor, in the introduction to Down to Earth, Land Demand in the New South Africa, says:

Land is conceived in diverse and often incompatible ways by various sectors of our society. The concerns of those who have landed interests or are interested in land do not derive from any inherent quality in the object itself, but rather from need as well as the socially and legally defined rights which have historically been attached to it (Marcus, Eales and Wildschut 1996).

As was the case in most of colonial Africa, white settlers introduced an alien legal system to those colonies that in 1910 became part of the Union of South Africa. This was essentially Roman Dutch Law, as applied in Holland during the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and forms the basis of South African common law to this day. Indigenous law, which governed the lives of the people already in occupation of the country was officially swept aside, but later selectively introduced in modified form as a means of administering and controlling indigenous people. In the minds and practices of many indigenous people, indigenous law governed a major aspect of their lives. This also applied to land, its use and occupation. Confusion and conflict was a direct result of the duality in land tenure perception (Marcus, Eales and Wildschut 1996, 175).

Indigenous law did not recognise individual ownership. Ownership of the land in the common law sense of the word did not exist. Land was seen as a common socio-economic asset, administered by the lawful authority in the form of the chief, in consultation with the tribal council, for the benefit of the entire tribe or community. Each member of the tribe or community had a right of access to the land, to use it or occupy it, and was governed by the laws and practices of the tribe or community. There was no land market as land was not a commodity of exchange. Membership of the tribe was the only qualification necessary to

obtain land.

Individuals had rights to occupy and use land according to particular rules and practices of the tribe or community. These rights were not exclusive and they may have been shared, in varying degrees, with others, either within a particular extended family or within the tribe. Thus one person may have had rights to cultivate land, but once the crop had been harvested, others had the right to graze cattle on the same piece of land (Marcus, Eales and Wildschut 1996, 176).

In 1870 the British introduced a Hut Tax in response to labour shortages. These taxes were a major source of income and revenue for the country and the cause of great hardship in the black communities.

As a white settler, the prevailing ideology with which Bertha would have been familiar was that blacks were inferior to whites. Bertha's attachment to and practice of this ideology may be seen in her attempts to convert the black labourers on her farms in order that they might be saved from ignorance and sin. Their culture may not have been considered to be valuable; rather it may have been seen to be an obstruction to "the truth" of Christian indoctrination.

After the South African War (1899-1902), precipitated by the failed Jameson Raid in 1895 which had attempted to overthrow the government of the Transvaal Republic (Saunders 1994, 147), attempts were made to eliminate economic competition between the four entities and encourage closer political ties between them, in order to stave off economic collapse. Lord Milner (1854-1925), Governor to the Cape and High Commissioner for South Africa in 1897) had imported English settlers to balance the numbers between Boers and English speakers and had tried to Anglicise the Afrikaners but without success. By 1905, there was a strong anti-Milner sentiment in both South Africa and Britain. Charles Everard was possibly part of a drive to introduce more English people to the Transvaal, encouraged by the prospect of mineral wealth (gold was discovered at the Witwatersrand in 1886) and related trade. His non-partisan approach is documented in Harmsen (1980, 1-2).

During the South African war, some 26 000 Afrikaner women, children and their black attendants died in British internment camps. The “scorched earth” policy of the British left farmlands ravaged, and the economic recovery of the Afrikaner was incomplete even by the 1930s. This war was a costly one to the British, in terms of lives lost and financially. Despite this, negotiations between the parties resulted in the Union of South Africa on the 31<sup>st</sup> of May, 1910. This concept of self-governance, while remaining a dominion within the British Empire, was granted with full British participation, and strong links were retained.

It was in 1910 that Bertha received an award for Peace of Winter (1909) (Fig. 37). In this and other paintings, Bertha presents the landscape as free of human habitation or development. The title is ironic when considering the political and social conditions of the day. Historically, the painting was preceded by a period of intense struggle between the Boers and British disputing the boundaries and dominance of their cultures. The period of reconciliation after the war was brief and superficial.

This work was done after the birth of her son, which may suggest that a more personal analysis is valid. This large landscape is of an open veld, with a gnarled willow tree at the banks of a winding, deep blue river. Naturalistically rendered, it evokes a feeling of timelessness and a certain melancholy, while presenting a grandiose vision of a rather unremarkable scene. Painted on one of her farms, it presents a view of that which was part of her experience, the hardships she had endured in the establishment of the new homestead and, simultaneously, a realistic representation of the world into which her son and heir was born. It is a graceful and dignified representation of her reality. The difference between this work and her earlier Figure in a landscape (c 1903) (Fig. 33) is marked in its accuracy (albeit somewhat romanticised) of her physical and emotional environment.

During this time Louis Botha (1862-1919) became the first Prime Minister of the Union and was a staunch supporter of reconciliation between Boers and English-speakers, while believing in the maintenance of the Imperial connection. Jan Christian Smuts (1870-1950) supported his friend and colleague’s view of conciliation between Boers and English-speakers after the war, and was an active but controversial cabinet member.



However, there were different attitudes to land and national identity prevalent in Afrikaner thinking. The new Union Government under Louis Botha tried to incorporate the so-called High Commissions Territory (the present day Lesotho, Botswana and Swaziland) but although prime ministers, J.C. Smuts and J.B.M. Hertzog (1866-1942), devoted much energy to this, they did not succeed. Hertzog, a staunch supporter of segregation, argued that the prohibition of alienation of land belonging to Africans no longer applied and incorporation could proceed. Coetzee suggests that the deep-rooted desire to incorporate the Territories was an aspect of the nationalism that has permeated Afrikaner thinking. The existence of an Imperial enclave like Basutoland (Lesotho) was a reminder that the Afrikaner struggle for national self-determination was incomplete as long as territorial boundaries did not correspond with their conception of geographical and, by implication, national integrity (Coetzee 1998, 39).

Hertzog was expelled from government in 1912 because of his strong nationalist views, but when he became prime minister in 1924, he upheld the Land Act of 1913, a law which legalised the extreme dispossession of “black”-owned land by prohibiting the purchase by “non-whites” of land outside the specific reserves set aside for this purpose. Effectively this forced less mechanised white and black farmers off the land. Between 1912 and the 1940s, massive state intervention was enforced in the establishment of railways, export markets, quota systems, job reservation and subsidies to assist white commercial farmers.

During World War 1, the Union, as part of the British Empire, was automatically at war against Germany. An armed Afrikaner rebellion resulted in response to the invasion of German South West Africa (now Namibia), as many South Africans had German origins and sympathies with its government. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the South African settler population was 35,5% German, (Saunders 1994, 7). During the war, heavy losses were suffered at the Somme, Delville Wood (which Bertha visited and painted in 1926) (Figs. 103-110), East Africa and German South West Africa. A large number (21.000) of black men did manual labour during this war, known as the South African Native Labour contingent, for the British army in France. Of these men 700 drowned at sea in 1917 when the troopship *Mendi* sank

(Saunders 1994, 168). Significantly, Bertha selected to paint the site of the death of white soldiers at Delville Wood (Figs.103-110) and although she may not have been aware of the *Mendi* tragedy, her portrayal of the ruined landscape suggests that her motivation was seldom if ever political.

After the South African War (1899-1902) Afrikaners were primarily farmers, teachers or ministers and were not involved in trade. That was dominated by English speakers. In order to address this imbalance and promote Afrikaner cultural interests, the cultural organisation *Federasie vir Afrikaanse Kultuurvereniging* was established in 1929, among other such organisations. In 1925 Afrikaans was recognised as an official language of the Union, replacing Dutch. In an effort to avoid Anglicisation at school level, Christian National Education schools were established after the South African War. In order to ensure language distinctiveness at a tertiary level, Afrikaans universities at Stellenbosch, Pretoria, Potchefstroom and Bloemfontein were established.

In 1918, a Spanish influenza epidemic caused the death of a quarter of a million South Africans, largely among Africans and Coloureds, most of whom were living in conditions of poverty. Bertha's children experienced this epidemic, although they had the means to acquire medication. Bertha discussed with Edith her attempts to find medicine for the labourers on the farm (TAG undated letter no 74).

In the 1920s, thousands of black farmers were organised into the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union of Africa and in the "apocalyptic" atmosphere of the times, sporadic but organised violence took place. The white owner-farmer, unsure of his labour, retaliated. Rural unrest ran concurrently with urban industrial unrest (Coetzee 1992, 40). On Bertha's return from Europe, she became aware of the change in the labourers' manner and the tensions between the black and white races.

During the depression of 1929 smaller farmers were hard hit, unable to pay off loans, developing a class of poor whites. Severe droughts in 1916, 1924 and 1927 exacerbated an already perilous situation. Blacks from reserves or cities were differentiated against by the

colour bar and jobs reserved for whites only (Coetzee 1992). It is possible that the Afrikaner farm managers employed by the Everards were from this newly disenfranchised group.

During 1910 to 1922 Bertha stayed at various places including the farm, Isipingo on the Natal south coast, Bloemfontein, and then Cape Town. Afterwards, she and the family moved to England around August 1922. There is little evidence of her discussing any political events other than the community's attempts to raise money for the British war effort and her contributions to church bazaars for this purpose (see various TAG letters). Bertha was primarily concerned during this time with the schooling of her children and, it would seem, putting as much distance between her and her husband as convention would allow. Despite the travelling, this was a productive and technically experimental period for Bertha. Ever restless, Bertha could not decide where she wanted to be, but it appears that while at Isipingo she seems to have had a change of heart about being away from the farm at Bonnefoi. She wrote to Edith on her return to Bonnefoi:

I can't really live anywhere else. I absolutely belong to this bare veld, and Oh! I must live in the country. There are so many loving town life and I can't love that, do pray as I will, I long all the time for the lonely hill tops. It is so necessary for some. Why, even our Lord withdrew from the towns and the crowds at times. How much more it is necessary for such as I am (Harmsen 1980, 56).

Between 1910 and before leaving for England in 1922, Bertha is known to have painted some thirty-two works including: The krantz (c1910) (Fig. 42), A street in Carolina (nd) (Fig. 43), Asbestos hills (pre 1911) (Fig. 44), Bonnefoi picnic (nd) (Fig. 45), Children under the trees (nd), Moonrise (nd) (Fig.46), Pale hillside (nd) (Fig.47), Veld fire (pre 1916), Winter in the Lowveld (pre 1916) (Fig.49), Cypresses (c 1916), The willows (c 1916) (Fig.50), Bluegum avenue at night (c 1916), Morning tree (c. 1916) (Fig.51), An evening voluntary (pre 1917), By the banks of the Komati (nd) (Fig.53), Spring, Eastern Transvaal (nd) (Fig.54), Winter grass, Transvaal (pre 1917) (Fig.55), Banks of the Komati (tondo in square, nd) (Fig.56), Wag 'n bietjies or The three witches (nd) (Fig.57), Moon and shadow (nd) (Fig.58), The Bonnefoi herd of Angora goats (1917) (Fig.59), Twantwani (nd) (Fig.60), Charlie's rocks, Skurweberg (nd) (Fig.61), Tree on Skurweberg (nd) (Fig.62), Portrait sketch of Ruth (nd) (Fig.63), Rock and thunderheads, Skurweberg (nd) (Fig.65), Green hills (nd) (Fig.66), Baboon valley (nd)

(Fig.67), Land of Luthany (1917) (Fig.68), Twin towered church, Bloemfontein (1919) and Looking towards Swaziland (1920/21) (Fig.70). In concurrence with Harmsen (1980), these works have been listed in the chronological order in which it was presumed they were painted.

It is evident that Bertha's style was undergoing transformations. It was during this period that she experimented with a palette knife with varying degrees of success, and finding different colours to match her perceptions of nature. It is in the smaller oils and sketches that her greater adventurousness is evident such as The willows (1916) (Fig.50), Wag 'n bietjies (nd) (Fig.57), Baboon valley (nd) (Fig.67), Twin-towered church, Bloemfontein (1919) (Fig.69) and some of the moon and shadow series.

The willows (Fig. 50) and Morning tree (Fig.51), both painted around 1916, are fairly large paintings of trees but quite different in the treatment of colour and application of paint. In The willows (Fig. 50), greenish blue and purple paint is applied in thick impasto slabs in an expressive manner, with little regard for formal composition or naturalistic representation. The tree trunks are bowed and crooked, and seem to assume some of the physical pain Bertha was feeling at the time, due to an infected ankle. Bertha told Edith of her discomfort and the great length of time she had taken, despite this, to complete the work in two days.

Morning tree (1916) (Fig. 51) is similar to Pierneef's trees in shape and similarly offers the viewer a sheltered view of the landscape. This work Bertha apparently reworked three times and she acknowledged that it was rather tight already (Harmsen 1980, 43). Again, Bertha complains of the lack of time she has to paint saying:

If only I were stronger and had more time I think I really could paint a thing or two worth doing, but I can do so little each day as it is... I am struggling on, not doing as much as I ought but some days I get such glorious glimpses of what I am struggling after, on others I am sodden and cold-hearted and then of course miserable, but these days are fewer than formerly and I have not been despondent for some time (Harmsen 1980, 43).

Bertha did not paint in the 1920s during her stay in Cape Town, and in the mid-twenties she



and her family were in Europe. It has been suggested that Bertha made provisional escape plans in the event of violence on the farm. This was possibly during the time of “native” unrest preceding the Great Depression. Although it is not clear when this was planned, it proved unnecessary (pers com LEH 2001).

Broadly speaking, land set aside as reserve for Africans was held in ownership by the state in its various manifestations. After the establishment of the South African Development Trust of 1936, most of the land set aside under the Land Acts of 1913 and 1936 was vested in the Trust, and later, as homelands were created, in the homeland governments. Urban land was not owned by African occupants but by the state, again in its various manifestations, or by white local authorities. Occupation of this land by Africans was either by way of lesser title or no title at all. These systems depended on political patronage and protection and had little status in law, which was consistent with the control over land demanded by apartheid policy (Marcus, Eales and Wildschut 1996, 174). Although it is uncertain, the Everard farm labourers seem to have been housed in compounds on the farms.

As a means of coping with insecure or no title, African people devised forms of tenure that, while not legally recognised, were viable alternatives for them. These forms reflected a combination of indigenous tenure and practical needs, depending on the locality of the ground in question (Marcus, Eales and Wildschut 1996, 174).

At the outbreak of World War 2, South Africa was again politically divided. In 1948 the *Herenigde (Reunited) Nasionale Party*, under the guidance of D.F. Malan (1874-1959), began implementing apartheid and acted in constitutional and unconstitutional ways to ensure that it (and Afrikaner ideology) remained in power. English speakers’ political influence declined markedly after 1948, giving their allegiance to the United Party, which slowly lost support until its demise in 1977 when Afrikaner nationalism was fore-grounded.

The persistent theme of racial segregation in South Africa was a common ideology in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and had been proposed by social Darwinists who assumed a correlation between racial identity and mental capacity. This they saw as justifying white supremacy



over the dark races and therefore racist thinking was implicit in the discourse of the day. Social anthropologists in South Africa in the 1920s advocated different treatment of blacks, giving authority to segregationist policies. It was considered “common sense”, and was arguably part of Bertha’s justification of her mission and missionary work among the black labourers on her farms.

The apparently prevailing preference for segregation of races seems to have had its origins firmly rooted in the history of this country. H.F. Verwoerd (1901-1966) is often incorrectly assumed to have masterminded apartheid. Research shows that apartheid was the enforcement of previously established segregationist policies advocated by both Boer and English-speaking politicians to various degrees. The Sauer Committee formulated the policy directions for the National Party before the 1948 elections. This rejected racial integration and assimilation of Coloureds, Indians and Africans that the earlier Fagan Commission under Smuts’ instruction had suggested. As a result of this report, based on and sanctified by the academic research of G. Cronje at Pretoria University in 1940, state-controlled schools, the establishment of reserves, and restricted urbanisation was instigated. Relationships between blacks, coloureds, Indians and whites were prohibited in the Marriage Act of 1948 and the Separate Amenities Act was enforced in 1953 (Saunders 1994, 17).

There was an upsurge in anti-Semitism in the late 1930s and early 1940s. This formed part of the right-wing Afrikaner nationalist worldview. Bertha’s remarks concerning the suitability of a former suitor of her daughter who was seen in the company of a “Jewish shop girl” was made in the 1930s in a climate very different to that prevailing after World War 2.

In 1930, the vote was extended to include white women and in 1931, income and property qualifications for white male voters were removed. These apparently enlightened moves were effectively responsible for increasing the number on the white voters’ roll, and by 1969 black, Coloured and Indian votes were abolished. Again, the government encouraged whites to unite in their attempts to disempower blacks. Bertha expressed some disappointment at missing an opportunity to vote in a letter to Edith (TAG undated letter no 4).

Despite divisions among whites, blacks were effectively conquered and dominated between 1870 and 1900. The tensions between Boer and English speakers were exacerbated during the SA War but for political and economic reasons, political unity was maintained. Between 1910 and 1948, whites consolidated power over the state and pursued policies of segregation. Again in 1926, Boer and English tensions mounted over the new flag, but this was settled by the inclusion of emblems from both factions. The Depression saw a renewed unity of purpose by the government to promote the interests of the white populace, at the expense of blacks.

Women in South Africa, both black and white, were marginalised by the patriarchal hegemony of their cultures. In 1883 the South African writer Olive Schreiner wrote: "To be born a woman was to be born branded." (Saunders 1994, 261). Despite this, white British and Afrikaner women played significant (if often "invisible") roles in their cultures in various types of social work in women's leagues.

In the hierarchy of gendered discrimination, black women had less status than the white women of the dominant culture. The parasitic system of migrant mine labour depended on black women remaining in the reserves to sustain productivity and the social integrity of the rural homestead. This was informally sanctioned by rural chiefs and male elders, and maintained by local municipal restrictions. Christianity supplied some relief for black women. Despite its emphasis on subservience to her husband, it advocated companionship in marriage rather than arranged marriages. White women were given the vote but not black. Despite the attempts of some liberal white women to draw attention to the plight of black women, little was achieved in terms of the law (Saunders 1994, 262, 263).

It is therefore not surprising that Pierneef's nationalist Afrikaner ideology, inherent in his well-publicised work at art exhibitions, captured the public's imagination sufficiently well to make him a household name while Bertha, a contemporary of his, slipped into obscurity. Both artists chose landscape as their subject and after a period of naturalistic representation, they moved towards a greater decorativeness while avoiding complete abstraction and non-descriptive colour. Pierneef became a celebrated artist, despite the fact that his later work

became increasingly stylised and abstracted. This research argues that despite Bertha's reluctance to exhibit publicly as a result of negative criticism, her obscurity was exacerbated by her status as a female artist within the patriarchal art society. Her preference for experiment with techniques and styles, and an unwillingness to rest upon the laurels awarded for her work entitled Peace of Winter (1909) (Fig. 37) did not always find favour with current art critics, nor with the general public. Bertha's motives for painting were not bound to the notion of public prestige, nor did she wish to exert power through her work. Self absorbed and intensely private, her work was primarily a cathartic release of tensions and experiences. This does not deny the fact that negative criticism or public acclaim did not affect her. Her dismay at the poor reception of her work is described in Harmsen (1980).

Of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century South African painters, Pierneef seems to have been the most popularly acclaimed in landscape. Both Bertha and Pierneef were white, which placed them in a position of privilege, but as a woman Bertha, was subject to patriarchal authority although her position as white allowed her to exercise some power over blacks in the country's social hierarchy of segregationist racist politics. Like Bertha, Pierneef chose to paint unpeopled landscapes. As a male of Dutch descent, he was fiercely nationalistic and a self-appointed guardian of Afrikaner tradition and culture. His outspoken remarks about British Imperialism have been discussed in a previous chapter. His work, dealing in South African landscape, is rich in metaphor. The underlying nationalist and imperialist discourses are clearly revealed in Coetzee's research (Coetzee 1992). Pierneef depicts South African landscape as empty and as not belonging to anybody, "silent and virgin" and in so doing invokes the myth of the empty land. Coetzee suggests that Pierneef's landscapes articulate the discourse of Afrikaner ideology (Coetzee 1992, 37).

Pierneef's landscapes are said to be an invitation to take ownership because the land is empty, and therefore does not belong to anyone. It is also a reassurance and a promise of this because its aestheticising distance means that it is frozen in time, eternally present as the utopian ideal. In its unexplored condition, it suggests riches and potential, and the sign of the "divine election". This argument is premised on Max Weber's argument that the Calvinist has a duty to his money, property and possessions that must be multiplied, and that prosperity

was in itself perceived as a sign of election (Coetzee 1992, 37). It could be argued that Bertha's disapproval of Afrikaner money-consciousness and desire for prosperity (acquisition of more land) derives from an understanding, albeit subconscious, of such an outlook. This research would argue that Bertha's interest in landscape perhaps stems from a need to experience the "savage" and terrifyingly lonely expanses in order to invoke a sense of the sublime that she equated with a spiritual and religious understanding of God. It was on these painting excursions that Bertha felt most alive, and furthest away from the "anaesthetic" of everyday duties. Her perceptions do not appear to have been coloured by a nationalist or imperialist yearnings. However the continued acquisition of large tracts of land by Charles Everard and Bertha's sustained interest in their development and materialistic interest in their productivity is not easily reconciled with the former argument.

Coetzee says that for the Afrikaner the "God-forsaken wilderness was the city, while the farm, the tamed wilderness, was God-imbued". Accordingly, to the Afrikaner, Pierneef's landscape depicts nature that is half-way between culture and nature (Coetzee 1988, 65). "Landscape painting partially suspended the dualism between nature and culture, and preserved the illusion of intimacy with nature and therefore with God... To define this relationship, the term '*natuurmens*' was invented" (Coetzee 1992, 37).

Furthermore, Coetzee (1992) suggests that Pierneef as an artist was ideally suited to express ideas like these (wide open spaces, dramatic landscape and weather conditions) to reaffirm people's "*nietigheid*" (insignificance), to overcome this and live in this world in freedom, to observe and control. His landscapes, because of his close ties culturally and artistically with the Dutch pantheistic tradition \*, reflects the movement's rejection of the materialism of modern culture and helps to mark the birth of environmentalism. This pantheistic idea of God can best be expressed when the land in the landscape is emptied of detail and objects, natural or otherwise.

The desert is, however, paradigmatic of the South African landscape as "the true South African landscape is of rock, not foliage" and "the South African artist must employ a

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\* pantheism, broadly speaking, was part of the ideology of some Dutch philosophers and artists, Mondrian being



geological not a botanical gaze”, and “this geological term is particularly intriguing because it claims that vegetation disguises landscape” (Coetzee 1992, 37). Bertha’s preference for communion with nature, her reference to herself as a plant thirsting for spiritual water, and her claim that when dead she could only hope to be fairly good manure, suggests a personal affiliation with the earth. Her paintings of rocks and gorges and the accordant sense of spiritual aspiration suggest a certain pantheism. She struggled with Christianity and its manifestations on earth. Her sense of peace and union with God was most closely felt in nature. Many of her paintings make use of a meandering river or watercourse that, given her association with God and water, makes this choice of metaphor appropriate in a country (arguably herself) in need of water (spiritual refreshment).

The emptiness of the land suggested unknown riches, untapped potential and exploitability to the white settler, surveying the scene with what Coetzee calls “the imperial eye” (Coetzee 1988, 174). Bertha was both excited at the prospect of the wealth associated with discovering rich reserves of platinum on the farm but more importantly, perhaps, afraid of the destruction it would bring (Harmsen 1980, 107).

Pierneef, by way of Dutch influence, tapped directly into the Northern European tradition of landscape painting. The exploitative, colonial, even imperial attitude to the land finds its expression in Pierneef’s Station Panels in Johannesburg (1929-1932). Coetzee demonstrates that Pierneef’s works were partial to the project of Afrikaner Nationalism. Van der Watt, in an article on the work of a contemporary South African artist Walter Meyer, explains that Pierneef’s “empty and idealised landscapes simply erased indigenous habitation while prioritising signs of white (read Afrikaner) occupation by focusing on Cape-Dutch architecture, prominent church steeples, farming and mining activities and loaded historical sites like Amajuba” (van der Watt 1997, 26). While both men choose landscape as their subject, Meyer’s work is shown to be in stark contrast to that of Pierneef’s, showing the effect of decay and abandonment of the types of *dorpië*s (villages) that Pierneef had previously valorised as symbols of Afrikanerdom.



Pierneef's popularity is remarkable, given his later decorative bent, among the largely conservative Afrikaans-speaking population, until one realises that he was able to convey a strong sense of nationalism, patriotism and in the exclusion of any reference to the indigenous peoples, his own participation in the imperialist ideologies of that time. His importance was underscored by the propagandistic and mythical descriptions and hitherto unheard of patronage of a South African artist by significant members of the Afrikaner *volk*.

When Pierneef started his station panels, more than 300,000 whites - most of them Afrikaners - were indigent. The situation of many blacks must have been significantly worse. Nowhere in the panels is there any evidence of the prevailing conditions in rural districts, although Pierneef was aware of them. His landscapes are an outsider's view of the land, a view of the land that was de-historicised and drained of compassion. It is a view that is at the same time informed by a sterile religious mysticism. Coetzee says: "It is useless to look for evidence in the paintings and especially in the Station Panels of the conditions that forced the erstwhile farm dwellers off the farms and into the urban slums. It is the deafening silence, the total absence, the absolute suppression of this tragedy that speaks the loudest." (Coetzee 1992, 42).

Grosskopf (1947) said of Pierneef:

...practically all the substances of our material and physical being are derived from the soil of our country, that we end by becoming part of it again. The soul of a nation, he said, is inescapably determined by the nature and character of its habitat. Fate has made us part of our soil. Far deeper, therefore than the professional delight of the painter's eye in colour, form and line of the landscape there lies hidden in Pierneef that filial feeling, that adoration of our own ground (land); it is the secret flame that gives his ripest work their intrinsic eloquence (Grosskopf, 1947, 23 quoted in Coetzee 1992, 40).

Pierneef was also described as a "*natuurmens*" (Coetzee 1992, 37). Influenced by his love of nature and knowledge of the veld, this name was not given to any other landscape painter in South Africa. Pierneef, however, was an urbanite and not a "*plaasboer*" and therefore his paintings may be seen as responding to the need of the new urbanites. Pierneef lived halfway between town and farm, a smallholding outside Pretoria (Coetzee 1992, 42). How much more

accurate, then, would it be to apply this name to Bertha? Unlike Pierneef, she was actively engaged in the daily activities associated with running working farms. She was knowledgeable about the flora and fauna that occurred there. She was in control of the planting and harvesting, and actively involved in the building of watercourses and at times the ploughing. Hers was not the eye of a disinterested spectator who painted views of the veld to adorn the homes and offices with nostalgic scenes of a lost landscape. In Bertha's letters, she expresses her preference for the quietness of country life, the open spaces and the loneliness, to the bustle of city life.

The interest in landscape among artists and buyers (usually urban-based white buyers and patrons of the arts) can be partially explained by the growing urbanisation of whites after 1890. After the South African War, urbanisation of the Afrikaner increased dramatically and steadily. Therefore, the depiction of rural farm life may simply reflect a nostalgic need for consolation in the psychologically traumatised and newly urbanised and urbanising community. The frequency of scenes of lonely farmlands, picturesque mountains and almost featureless plains under a pale sun-drenched sky, would tend to support this view. This was also a current theme in literature at the time: i.e. a peaceful setting, temporarily vacated (Coetzee 1992, 42).

Pierneef's identification with Afrikaner nationalism occurred gradually and coincided with his search for an artistic identity. It is possible to see this growing identification in two ways. Firstly, it may be seen as a response to political events (albeit in an artistic sense), and secondly as a response to Pierneef's consistent market. Pierneef, acutely aware of his Dutch origins and aware of the growing Afrikaner patronage of his art, responded by presenting his art as genuinely, authentically, South African.

This research suggests that Bertha felt no such compunction. Her aim was not motivated by the promise of financial gain nor politics. Bertha's apparent lack of interest in politics and, indeed, scorn of politicians, is evident in her letters. Her inability to side with any nationality in a significantly coherent way, her dismissal as vulgar any reference to money, and her dislike of self-advertisement may be why her work was not selected as exemplary during the

1930s and the associated search for a national style.

Neither did Bertha actually own the land that she painted. Charles's apportioning of the properties in his will reveal this fact, although her development of the properties does suggest a sense of ownership. This is insufficient reason to assume that Bertha's landscapes reveal the work of a disinherited, marginalised woman. What it does suggest is that her affiliation with the soil or landscape was not materialistic.

The sense of form and pictorial organisation in Pierneef's landscapes is what appealed to the viewer. Coetzee suggests that the reasons are ideological and historical. Landscape gives the viewer the illusion of control, of the imposition of order on the chaotic world outside.

Pierneef used the word "*beheers*". Coetzee suggests that it is this search for order that explains the dominance of form in Pierneef's paintings. He said: "form-as-the-essence of the landscape [that] is the *raison d'être* of his art". Pierneef's statement that: "*Ons land het nie kleur nie, maar vorm, grootste vorm*" [candidate's translation: Our land does not have colour, but form, significant form] became the basis of his art (Coetzee 1992, 45).

Bertha's best work relies on colour and pictorial composition. There is evidence of a decorative manipulation of colour and line to produce a pleasing composition. She did not always paint precisely what she could see; rather she altered nature in such a way as to express an intense and subjective view. Cosgrove's interpretation of what constitutes landscape painting is relevant:

It [landscape] offers a view of the world directed at the experience of one individual at a given moment in time when the arrangement of the constituent forms is pleasing, uplifting or in some other way linked to the observer's psychological state; it then represents this view as universally valid by claiming for it the status of reality (Cosgrove in Coetzee 1992, 35).

Bertha's series of Delville Wood paintings (Figs.103-110) suggest an empathy with the plight of the soldiers' massacre. That this empathy was directed towards young white men rather than the plight of blacks in South Africa signifies something of the underlying racial attitudes in the dominant ideology of her times. Perhaps as the mother of a much-loved son she could

relate more strongly to the situation. During World War 1, Bertha expressed her desire to help with the war effort and commended those who were in a position to actively engage with it. She felt that her fund-raising attempts were feeble by comparison. The duty towards her own young family was paramount and she decided against a desire to enlist in active service.

Bertha's response to the ravaged landscape was deeply felt and ranged from deep despair to that of (grudging) acceptance. The torn trees lined up across a hilltop like crosses at Golgotha may be a symbol of indictment rather than hope of salvation. Unlike Edith, who included wild flowers in her poetry as symbols of hope, Bertha seemed to despair at God's absence during this terrible slaughter. Unlike Nash, she did not use figures to contextualise the event. Rather, she painted rows of crosses at the memorial site in Monument and cemetery, Delville Wood (c1926) (Fig. 110) that express with great clarity her understanding of the loss of life. This work evokes a melancholy reminiscent of de Chirico's metaphysical paintings in the strangely disassociated images of death in an Italianate landscape.

There may be many reasons why figures are excluded. Firstly, the war had occurred ten years previously, she was not especially competent at figure painting and Edith's advice to exclude them may have also had an effect on this decision. Acquainted with Nash's work, Bertha may have purposely excluded them because of their historical references, as her response was primarily self-referential, not political. The unnatural colours and at times frenzied manipulation of paint suggest that this painting experience was not done in order to create a work for public display. As seen in her smaller private work, this experimentation was largely reserved for personal rather than public work. These works did not receive favourable criticism at the time, and were thought lacking in historical accuracy, charm and competence. South Africa House in London would only accept one as a donation from the family later, and had refused to purchase it. Bertha's works do not contain the rational, disassociated but accurate historical references to the battle, other than that suggested by the title. Her subjective response was drawn from her emotional response to the site of villainous disfigurement of the landscape. The indictment of God's absence or lack of intervention must have supported and informed her later crisis of faith.

As an educated white woman who lived in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in South Africa, Bertha has bequeathed her vision to those who would pause to look. A narrow and selected view, perhaps, but an intensely personal one. Susceptible to criticism, dogmatic in her assumptions and prejudiced in her perceptions, the quality of her work fluctuated and her expression was sometimes plagued by mannerisms and clichés of style. The expression of Bertha's work was seldom directed at political issues. Seldom compromised by a desire for political or social acclaim, at times constrained or enabled by the dominant ideology of her culture(s), her work may be seen as an expression of the intersecting discourses at work during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in South Africa.



## CONCLUSION

Motivated primarily by a desire to explore possible interpretations of landscape as a form of metaphor in the until recently relatively unheralded work of Bertha Everard, this study was undertaken in an attempt to examine possible reasons for her choice of this subject and the factors that influenced the relative anonymity of her oeuvre when the work of many of her contemporary male and female artists was being nationally and even internationally acclaimed.

Much research undertaken in the humanities may prove to be inconclusive. Similarly, this research did not proceed from any pre-formulated hypothesis, nor did it set out to draw any conclusive evidence or reasons for Bertha's motivation or stylistic changes. The somewhat ephemeral nature of her participation in the South African art context seemed intriguing, and this research determined chiefly to speculate about what may have motivated or constituted the woman who painted with so much energy and with relatively insignificant public accolade during her life.

Assisted by the Tatham Art Gallery's permission to access their archives and the kind assistance of Leonora Everard Haden (Bertha's granddaughter) and Nichola Leigh (Bertha's great granddaughter), this research was able to glean unexpected insights into what constituted the Everard Group, especially Bertha.

The Everard Phenomenon Exhibition (2000) excited an initial response to the work of this group of South African female painters. To this candidate, their work seemed to present an interesting and worthy subject for research. Of this group, it was apparent that while many of its members' work had merit, the undisputed matriarch was Bertha. Her energetic and dramatic treatment of her subject seemed to contrast with this candidates (mis) perception of Victorian women's propensity for painting sedate or illustrative watercolours.

There are a number of possible reasons for a revival of interest in Bertha's work:

- a) The inheritance of Ruth's estate by Leonora and Bryan Everard Haden left them with

a considerable body of work, some of which they chose to sell through public auction and to public, corporate and private collectors.

- b) The interest in the Everard's by the wife of the Chairman of Standard Bank and the Bank's subsequent purchase of a sizeable collection of Everard paintings.
- c) The promotion of the Standard Bank collection of Everard work by Professor Alan Crump through commissioning Jill Addleson to curate an exhibition.
- d) Arnold's interest in the group as a feminist research interest.

The subjective interpretation of this research is acknowledged, but without substantial apology. For it is in the unearthing and examination of such and similarly neglected histories from a personal and subjective point of view that future research may well be enriched.

This research has skimmed the surface of what could constitute further research, especially from a feminist perspective. It has also highlighted the absence of much information pertaining to this group, which would make for careful and meticulous analysis of archives relating to the work of its various members. There are also un-researched areas about Bertha's stay in France and England that could be of value, as would more specific research about the influence of the Bloomsbury Group on the lifestyle of the Everard family.

The interdependence between Edith and Bertha has not been adequately investigated, as further documentation of the remaining letters and Edith's personal history may reveal. During this research, it became evident that there were many areas of further study that should be covered in order to create a more balanced view of Bertha's work. For instance, there are many hundreds of letters that have not yet been documented, many questions left unanswered and many paintings that through damage, distance, storage or loss have not been available for study.

Bertha's depiction of landscape has proved to be a difficult subject; its subjective selection and at times the unremarkable scenery she painted do not provide the researcher with a sure footing. Speculative interpretation is, however, balanced to some extent by the examination of underlying discourses that may, or in fact, may not, have influenced her work.

This speculation is also revealing of the discourses influencing the angle from which this candidate's enquiries stem. Interested in the apparent neglect of Bertha's work and the critical acclaim of other artists of similar merit, this research hoped to gain some insight into the machinations of the South African art society to ascertain what assured critical artistic acclaim during her life. A concern was why Bertha's work was re-emerging in the year 2000, when her death had sparked little interest in 1965? Modernism's apparent preference for non-representational work and the exclusion of what may have been perceived as somewhat insular and place-specific paintings such as those Bertha made, had little value in the search for underlying universal truths. Bertha's distance from the petty squabbles and nationalistic drives in the South African art world ensured a greater independence from these considerable forces.

Bertha did not comply with Modernism's demands for universality through abstraction. Despite forays into design and abstracted interpretation of the perceptual world, she was and remained primarily an expressive painter, delighting in or shrinking from her perceptions of the world. Landscape provided her with the motivation and space she needed to express what she felt and how she saw it.

Within the limitations of available information it was hopefully possible to suggest some reasonable interpretations of her work. This research would like to suggest that had Bertha not been largely accepting of Victorian moralistic ideology and conventionality, and had she been able and willing to pursue her work as an artist in the constricting chauvinistic and patriarchal South African and English art society, she may well have enjoyed greater public acclaim in her life. Nevertheless Bertha was an educated woman who made informed life choices and was by no means a victim of circumstance.

Greater even than her desire to paint seems to have been her determination to provide a nurturing and stimulating domestic environment for her children. She appears to have sublimated much artistic energy and personal happiness with child-rearing and missionary work in an attempt, perhaps, to conform to the concept of what constituted women's roles at that time, and in a bid to improve on the environment that she may have experienced as a

child.

Her reliance on Edith's approval and guidance suggest the indecisiveness, hesitation and vacillation she may have experienced and indicates a lack of self-confidence apparent in some of her work. However, this is precisely the work that has been overlooked by many critics and historians in the search for monumental examples of South African art. Many of these more tentative, searching works have value that reveal a less bold, at times even timid woman that felt the need to create work that expressed some romantic notion of "great art", believing that her more personal work was of no interest to the public at large.

Bertha's ambivalence to solitude and her intensely felt sense of privacy appears to have been both a strength and hindrance to her work. This research argues that her most engaging works are those done when her very strong sense of self-consciousness was disrupted by an intensity of emotion and /or pain that she experienced privately. Seldom has this intensity or endearing vulnerability been found to be evident in her major works. Of the works studied, it is suggested that greater attention could be paid to those works that have been largely overlooked.

Attempts by some historians, critics or art dealers, motivated to promote her larger works, perhaps for financial gain or in a belatedly Postmodern attempt to re-evaluate women's work, suggests tokenism. Aspects of what constituted Bertha's oeuvre have sadly been neglected. However, it is acknowledged that the Everard Phenomenon Exhibition (2000) has played a significant role in the motivation for this research. It is hoped that this dissertation may be a useful addition to future research.

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## **APPENDIX 1: LETTERS**

### **Summary of Letters from Tatham Art Gallery**

This information is treated with caution as only a fraction of the letters have been utilized and I do not propose that the contents are in any way a complete or “true” reflection of the subjects I have selected to highlight.

Most of the letters at the Tatham Art Gallery are from Bertha to her sister Edith. Very few letters are dated, which makes accurate chronology difficult. It may be ascertained from the contents as to more or less when they were written.

### **EDITH**

In nearly every one Bertha addresses Edith with great affection, e.g.: “darlingest” or “my love”. She signs herself as “B”, “Bertie” or “Birdie”, and sometimes includes a little cartoon of herself or some event about which she has written. She often appeals to Edith for spiritual advice. Bertha also frequently sought Edith’s advice on her work, and it appears from Bertha’s comments that this advice was often considered insightful and of critical merit. Bertha felt that she could fool the public but not her sister. Bertha was also critical of Edith’s work, although during this research no letters read to date make any reference to Edith’s work. Bertha was apparently very self absorbed; she expected and demanded Edith’s attention but does not appear to have asked about Edith’s teaching career very frequently. Bertha also “confesses” to Edith about her spiritual as well as public “misdemeanours”. Bertha’s irascibility and fear of crowds was often mentioned, with Bertha showing awareness of the sometimes irrational dislike of crowds and people generally.

In a fit of disappointed rage and humiliation, Bertha tells Edith about her fury with the attitude of black people under her care. An uncensored and almost incoherent rage reveals her demands and expectations of them and her perception of their behaviour as thankless and ignorant. At that time, her contemporary social circle may have found the racist language that she used acceptable. Nevertheless, Bertha does not appear to have dwelt on their colour difference but rather on what she perceived as their ignorance and lack of desire to be



“improved” by Bertha’s Late Victorian ideas of morality and social behaviour. In mitigation, Bertha admits that she is not without fault, that her salvation is also not assured, and that as a result of her anger, her soul is also lost. Everard Haden has pointed out that Bertha was very much like her father (Capt. Valentine King), who also experienced irrational rages but was apologetic and ashamed soon after these outbursts.

According to Everard Haden, neither Bertha nor Edith was religious until Edith had some sort of revelatory experience. Everard Haden cannot remember when that happened but suggests it was about the time they came to South Africa. After this event, she suggested that Edith celebrated two birthdays, and had a small pendant made for herself to commemorate this day. It had a pearl in the centre of a shell-like form. It now belongs to Nichola.

Many of the letters are poorly punctuated. Bertha’s sentences flow in a long stream and are perhaps evidence of thought patterns, rarely censored, and apparently often without forethought. Some are not without malice. Bertha was very critical of people whom she saw as socially inferior, and the vehemence with which she maligns the poor Cowper woman almost suggests that there was a great deal more to her dislike of Cowper than was being discussed.

## CHARLES

Bertha’s marriage to Charles appears to have been a sensible plan. He had money and social status and he appears to have adored her. Bertha wanted a family, a secure home life and children. But she also wanted to paint. Marrying Charles must have seemed like the perfect solution. Sadly, it does not appear to have been a happy union for very long. Firstly, Bertha married a man whose family, his brothers and later sister-in-laws, seem to have been important to him. There does not appear to have been much love lost between Bertha and her in-laws. A colonial farming community, with its emphasis on practical issues, Bertha regarded herself at least partially as an artist, and perhaps as someone whose taste and ideas differed markedly from that of the local farmers. Fresh from the academies in Europe, used to being a relatively emancipated woman who had enjoyed refined company in Europe, this attitude was perhaps not unfounded. Having been able to camp along rivers to paint *en plein*

*air*, and enjoy the acceptance of her work at the Royal Academy, Bertha was now expected to become a farmer's wife. She appears to have done this with enthusiasm, designing and overseeing the building of Bonnefoi homestead. Everard Haden suggests that Bertha had complained of the hardship involved with this attempt (pers. com. LEH 2001). But she also wanted to paint. Her response to her new family and surroundings in the painting entitled Figure in a landscape (c1902) reveals a young woman eager to please, her style quite academic, the colours naturalistic in a somewhat romantic interpretation was perhaps used to win over Everard hearts, and to prove her ability as an artist. Her disappointment when it was not given the acclaim she believed it was due must have been disheartening.

Bertha's relationship with Charles appears to have faltered quite early on in their marriage. They had three children in fairly quick succession. This may have been necessary as Bertha was thirty when she married. Bertha soon got into the habit of trekking around the country with all the children, either on painting expeditions or on holidays to the coast for her health, or to Cape Town for the children's education. Charles rarely seems to have accompanied them, but appears to have paid for their excursions.

Bertha and Edith's relationship was very close and perhaps Charles may have felt excluded. Bertha refers to this in a rather defensive way in one of the letters, blaming him for his exclusion. The growing emotional distance must have been exacerbated by Bertha's decision to go to Europe, ostensibly for the education of the children. Her unhappiness at Bonnefoi (and specifically with Charles saying... "I almost hate C today...") may have been as great an incentive as the desire to have the children educated at home. In Europe, Charles seems to have kept her on a tight budget. She complained to Edith of this fact. In an unusual chain of events, Charles actually visited Bertha and family in Cape Town shortly before their departure, perhaps to argue against this or to arrange finances. Bertha's remarks in a letter to Edith suggest that Charles had barely agreed to this decision and that they should depart before Charles changed his mind, and while he had the money. This suggests some manipulation and pressure rather than parental agreement. Her letters to Edith about a shortage of money reveal her dislike of having no money to buy the children Christmas presents. Charles does not seem to have been parsimonious all the time (if ever). Ruth and

Rosamund's thank-you letters reveal gratitude, love and respect for his generosity.

While away in Europe, Bertha missed the farm, and in its absence seems to have begun to idealise their life there. On their return, Bertha was disappointed by the gulf that had grown between herself and Charles, and what she perceived to be the disarray and neglect on the farm, and the laziness and surliness of the black labourers. Some of this dissatisfaction appears to have been transferred to the children, especially Ruth, who was arguably Bertha's favourite and with whom she identified most strongly.

How much Ruth apparently disliked being alone on Bonnefoi (with her father) cannot be ascertained. He was happy to read good reviews of Ruth's work but criticised her painting of him, as the chess pieces in the work were incorrectly placed. This suggests a very pragmatic, and quite observant person. Bertha once accused Charles of being an arrogant know-it-all. She asked Edith to read to him to broaden his mind. Bertha urged him to do something for the war effort, but to no avail it seems. Bertha felt confined by the needs of her family, and her ill-health, and attributed this to her inability to do more for the war effort. She decided to auction some of her work at a show for the war effort. She also contributed some time and farm produce to church bazaars in order to raise money for the war effort.

Rosamund, however, was happy to be beside her father. Her early death was a great blow to him, as it was to Bertha. Charles was in his nineties when this happened and it appears that he never fully accepted nor understood that Rosamund was dead, and often spoke of her as if she were alive. He died soon after her death.

## **CHILDREN AND MOTHERHOOD**

It is not disputed that Bertha wanted and loved her children and that she took it upon herself to provide them with what she saw as the best possible education. She was determined that they should be with her as young children and receive a proper education, and so elected to teach them at home. This was probably a reasonable decision, as most schools were far away from the farm that would have meant the children would have had to board away from home. Bertha was qualified to do so as she had a teaching diploma from England. What she did not

know sufficiently well, she employed a succession of governesses to teach. Henry Sturt, Bertha's half-brother, coerced Bertha into allowing the girls to attend Eunice School in Bloemfontein where Edith was head. Reluctant to concede defeat, Bertha pretended shortly afterwards that this had been her intention all along.

According to Everard Haden, Bertha was a very strict mother. This may have been as a result of having experienced a similar childhood while under foster care. As a child, Bertha had been locked in a coal shed for a misdemeanour, and was very afraid. Feelings of loneliness, isolation and a dislike of confined space may perhaps be attributed to such incidents. Similarly, her dependence on her older sister Edith's company and dislike, even fear of crowds, may be traced back to such experiences. During her childhood, Edith was apparently her only companion. It may be assumed that having been separated under unpleasant circumstances from her father and later from her mother as a very small child, Bertha felt that Edith's presence was necessary to her happiness and existence.

Bertha insisted that the children swim in the winter to make them strong and resistant to infection. According to Everard Haden, this caused them to get sick, possibly with jaundice. In some letters to Edith, Bertha discusses her concerns about hygiene, appropriate manners and education of the children.

Ruth, the older daughter, seems to have been Bertha's favourite in many ways. She was talented at painting and very close to her mother. Ruth suffered from a heart complaint (no further details are available) and was treated with care. Ruth also had severe depressions that distressed Bertha enormously. These were usually related to Ruth's work or love affairs. Bertha was very involved with regard to Ruth's love affairs. Bertha seems to have despised many of Ruth's beaux, sometimes with reason if there is any truth to her observations. Bertha missed Ruth very much when Ruth was in Europe studying, perhaps especially so as she was alone at Bonnefoi where things were not pleasant. Ruth seems to have reciprocated this affection and cared for Bertha in her old age, staying on at Bonnefoi long after the farm and homestead had fallen into disrepair.



Rosamund appears to have been more independent. As a child, she studied music instead of painting, agonised about her capability and suffered depressions as a result. Once in South Africa, Rosamund was a popular party-going girl, with a wide circle of friends and acquaintances. She was a keen, competent farmer, played in the local farmers' jazz club every so often and acted in locally produced plays. She took up flying which eventually led to her death.

Ruth and Rosamund were attractive young women but it appears that Rosamund was the more popular. She was actively pursued by a number of local young men, about whom Bertha was usually equally disparaging. There has been some mention of a suicide by a local man whom Rosamund had rejected but this has not been confirmed. Rosamund married a student whom she taught to fly, a younger man named Nicolaas Steenkamp. He died from a malarial disease while she was away on a flight. Her numerous, almost daily letters to him are affectionate. They express her love for him with great candour and some vulnerability. Ruth accused Rosamund of being a bit of a social butterfly, and Edith seems to have confirmed this. These love letters suggest that there was a side to Rosamund that she did not allow even her closest family to see. Rosamund was also a keen farmer. Bertha had suggested in England that she attend an agricultural school or college, but after enrolling her, Bertha changed her mind, and Rosamund was whisked off to France to share a flat with Ruth. Bertha believed it made more financial sense. No more was said and it is not known if Rosamund agreed or disagreed with this decision but she seems to have adapted well to the new plan.

Rosamund also painted, but without official tuition and minimal input from her mother or Ruth, although she must have been influenced by their work and techniques. Art was just another thing she did when she had the time. It didn't take precedence in her life. However her paintings are remarkable, and quite different from those of either her mother or sister, whereas it is difficult sometimes to differentiate between Ruth and Bertha's paintings, especially when Ruth's work begins to mature (France 1925/26). There does instead seem to be a stronger resemblance between Rosamund and Edith's paintings.



There seems to have been some tension between the sisters that may have been a jealousy or rivalry for Bertha's attention. Rosamund's flying may have been as a response to a desire to distance herself from a claustrophobic maternal bond. Rosamund travelled widely and brought back many beautiful fabrics and objects to the farm. Some of these items, shawls and dresses, are still kept by Nichola Leigh. According to Everard Haden, both Edith and Bertha dressed very well, and their South African friends and acquaintances apparently remarked upon this (pers com LEH 2001). No doubt during the time in Paris they bought various items of clothing for themselves and the girls.

Sebastian was Bertha's youngest child and she seems to have doted on his every word, noting in letters his preferences, joy, sadness and daily comings and goings with the delight of a devoted mother. She made excuses for his dislike of schoolwork and his later, what may be interpreted as surly behaviour, in adulthood. This may have masked some feelings of disappointment with him, although it is never openly mentioned. He seems to have found social interaction (especially with some men) very difficult; perhaps as a result of living among a group of such strong-minded women, and never being allowed to stray far from the flock. When he did go on excursions in France, he seems to have enjoyed it immensely. Rather a lonely young boy, one would imagine, perhaps lonely for playmates of his own sex and age. It appears that he was also neither musical nor artistic, although Bertha encouraged, in fact insisted, lessons in both. As an adult he commented vociferously on Rosamund and Ruth's choice of partners, saying they should steer clear of the arty types which he so mistrusted. At times he seemed to echo Bertha's feelings or opinions and it may be that they were not entirely his own.

Bertha sometimes reveals her own desires when she makes comments about her daughters' relationships with men. Bertha was obviously quite disappointed by Charles at times, and regarded him as a bit of a yokel. She seems to have manipulated him and perhaps coerced him into decisions that he perhaps felt ill-informed to argue about, for example regarding their children's education. Whether Charles was cool, cold, angry, caring or ignoring of her, Bertha was sensitive to his responses. This may suggest that Bertha valued his opinion in some matters, even though she makes unkind remarks about his inability to understand

modern art, especially regarding her own work. Perhaps Bertha had hoped that she could change Charles as she hoped to change the black labourers on her farms; to educate and refine and so save the soul of another “cultural infidel”. But as her failed missionary work bears testimony, this was not to be.

## **RELATIONSHIPS AND GENDER**

Bertha’s relationships were mostly complicated, whether with herself, her family or outsiders. She tried to maintain very high standards for herself and everyone else, and was disappointed when people (herself included) could or would not comply. She was an idealist. When life disappointed her, she seems to have become cynical and harsh. Bertha was also very critical. On issues of gender she was outspoken, albeit in letters to her sister, and held some very modern ideas about marriage and relationships that may have reflected her own experiences of these issues. She regarded a woman’s lot as second best, and that a new way of thinking about male-female relationships would have to come about sooner rather than later. She must have been aware of the suffragettes in England but nowhere have I found evidence to suggest this. She appears to have read Havelock Ellis (1859-1939), Edward Carpenter (1844-1929) and Roger Fry (1866-1934) with critical intelligence and interest.

Bertha was a very private person for whom interaction with society was sometimes more than she could bear. While preferring the solitude of the farm to the bustle of the city, she herself admits that too much solitude was not for her and she would become depressed. Self-promotion was abhorrent to her and she disliked publicity-seeking intensely. However, she did read the critical reviews of her work, and was often hurt by what she thought were foolish appraisals. She felt acutely rejected when her work was criticised. Edith seemed to sense this and was always there to patch her self-esteem together again. Edith often arranged for press coverage and encouraged Bertha to exhibit, sometimes writing articles to promote Bertha’s painting and church building.

Happiness for Bertha involved the company of her “own”; which seems to have consisted of Edith and her own children. Very little mention is made of other friendships with women, other than Bury, and she didn’t seem to miss them. She disliked Allerly Glossop’s painting it

is said, as it was too facile. Bury seems to have inhabited a curious space, neither friend nor servant, but somewhere in between, according to Bertha's current mood. She complained bitterly to Edith about Bury's faults while accepting her financial assistance at times. She caricatured Bury mercilessly, and sometimes spoke of her in a most disparaging way. Yet it was Bury whose long-suffering outlasted all, and it was she who nursed Bertha until the end.

From all accounts, Bertha seems to have been a difficult woman to get along with. Her letters suggest that she was at times self-centred and callous. But Bertha was not without insight of her own faults. She vacillated between putting her family or her art first. At times it is difficult to ascertain which is fore-fronted, as often her motives were, if not hidden, possibly disguised. Bertha was quite "correct" socially, despite the fact that she is said to have despised middle-class behaviour. She disliked what she termed spending an unseemly amount of money on her and her children by a gentleman friend (Paton, the artist). She and the children had spent a very pleasant day with him in Durban visiting art schools and discussing art-related subjects. Her discomfort at his generosity and her enjoyment of the pleasure may suggest a Victorian moral social code to which she may have felt obliged to adhere.

That Bertha never made much comment on other female artists other than the rather witheringly dismissive one about women artists in general, is hardly surprising. She had little contact with other artists. Those she did meet as her daughters' teachers she seems to have regarded as her inferiors, and there are records of her hostile opinion of them. Many artists and critics were male. Her nicknaming or caricaturing them for some physical or perceived infirmity on their part may suggest hostile feelings towards men in positions of authority. This may or may not be related to her experience of her father's behaviour when she was young. In turn, critics and reviewers (mostly men) were often curt and unfair in their summary dismissal of her work. So perhaps her attacks on them were made in anticipation of their dismissive or critical remarks. What does this suggest of her self-esteem? Perhaps her view of them (e.g. Heath, Roworth, and others) was well founded. Certainly, Roworth's patriarchal stance and attitude to modern art has suffered under recent criticism.

## **POLITICS AND RACISM**

Bertha regarded herself as an Englishwoman, despite the fact that she had been born in South Africa. Her childhood in England under foster care was strict and often lonely. Brought up in a society that adhered to class distinctions and that a woman's place was in the private rather than public sphere, Bertha seems to have accommodated these practices in her life. Her views on gender were altered according to her life experiences, and so were her social politics and response to race. Coming out to Africa was perhaps a romantic dream of returning to her place of birth. The romantic notion of the "dark continent", "savage Africa" and the "noble savage" may have appealed to her sense of adventure. In Late Victorian society, philanthropy was encouraged as a noble and womanly pastime. As an Anglican who attempted to do mission work, a strong sense of self-righteousness appears to have been a necessary ingredient.

In Italy she accused the Italians of being crude, the English as dull and conservative, and the weather intolerably wet, while France was intolerably hot in summer. A most unforgiving tourist, she did not appear to make many friends in Europe and complained at having to meet acquaintances for lunch in town. She judged everyone according to her own very set disciplines. Nationalistic pride was evident when she wanted to help with the British war effort. No concern has been noted for the plight of blacks whose lives were lost during World War 1, and yet she expressed some concern for those whom she employed on the farms. She had taken with her two young black boys from Bonnefoi when she went to England. She hoped to educate them, so that they in turn could help with mission work and school. Her plan was a failure ultimately, and one child left England early on as he was miserable. In adulthood, both men appear to have met with untimely deaths, and it appears that their community was suspicious and jealous of them (pers com LEH 2001). Was Bertha's inclusion of them in the trip to England entirely altruistic or was it self-aggrandising? Her attitude to blacks appears to be maternalistic, but this attitude was not uncommon at that time. Bertha's hopes of continuing mission work were dashed. To her great embarrassment, she was urged by the bishop to give it up altogether, as she was doing more harm than good. In her defence, she did learn to speak Zulu, and ensured that her children did so too. This

was unusual at that time. It has not been established whether or not the language they learned was a correct or bastardised version of the language. It may be presumed that some white farm children, who grew up with black children, were bilingual from an early age.

### **MISSION WORK AND FAITH**

Presumably a self-taught Anglican missionary (there is no reference to any education or qualification to do so), Bertha threw herself into converting the “heathen” shortly after the birth of her children, when she had the time and energy to devote to what she perceived to be the well-being of blacks.

Bertha remained a Christian, it seems, but had periods of severe misgivings about her “salvation” and her “soul”. Her love of ceremony and social events associated with church meetings seemed to appeal to her immensely. Everard Haden suggests that Edith and Bertha may have considered changing from Anglican to Catholic, but this has not been confirmed. Bertha always asked Edith about questions for which she could not find answers in the Bible. Edith was Bertha’s spiritual guide, it seems. Bertha lost patience with the bishops and the ministers that came to the farm. Bertha refers to light as being symbolic of God’s presence.

### **LANDSCAPE AND WEATHER**

Bertha frequently makes remarks about both landscape and weather in her letters. She found England too green and wet and dull; too “tame” and sad also. She described the South African landscape as cruel, harsh and also beautiful. Many of her drawings were done in the moonlight and she was entranced by cast shadows of clouds across the veld. She often refers to herself (her soul) as a small plant that needed watering or it would wither and die. Her consciousness appears very wrapped up in the land, the weather and its vegetation. She even hopes that as a “lost soul”, the least she can hope for is that she will make good manure for the soil.

Her verbal description of the landscape is often very evocative, and one gets the sense that she really lived and breathed what she saw with intensity. At a glance, Bertha’s paintings in South Africa before 1922 suggest an emotional intensity, whereas her last paintings suggest a



greater intellectual distancing with more emphasis on design aspects. Her landscape drawings (the few I have seen) are direct, confident and bold. As a student in England, Bertha's drawing ability is evident. Her earliest drawings and etchings are done in a meticulous, detailed and academic style. Her later drawings are far broader in concept, more confident and less interested in detail. Bertha's perception of colour was an emotional one. Her mood, often gloomy, would affect what she saw, sometimes making her incapable of lifting a brush.

## **ILLNESS**

From reading these letters one would be inclined to think that Bertha was either a severe hypochondriac or severely ill for most of her adult life. Nearly every letter makes some reference to some illness or complaint such as toothache, nausea or neuralgia. It seems as if she may at times have used illness to illicit much desired attention from Charles. Her letters often complain of various aches and pains, but are often followed by some declamatory remarks. It has been established that Bertha was a diabetic, needing medication at regular intervals, although it is not clear when this began. She complained of weight gain in Paris after hurting her knee in an accident, and this may have attributed to the condition in later life. Everard Haden suggests that her death may have been as a result of complications to a gangrenous foot (pers com LEH 2001). Bertha seems to have suffered from severe and debilitating bouts of depression. After every major painting, she became ill. This may have been as a result of being exposed to the elements for extended periods while she painted feverishly, or purely from emotional fatigue. Whatever the case, it was an accepted turn of events and apparently one that Charles anticipated with some misgivings. However, it seems that a trip into the veld would often succeed in cheering up Bertha.

## **EXHIBITIONS AND CRITICISM**

Nothing new has been discovered. Harmsen (1980) provides what appears to be an accurate account of these events and what relevant information has been gleaned by this research corroborates most of Harmsen's findings. Harmsen (2000) acknowledges her mistake of incorrectly identifying Peace of Winter (1910) as the award-winning painting from the South African National Union Exhibition, instead of Mid-Winter on the Komati (1910).

## **WORK AND PAINTING**

Bertha frequently expresses dissatisfaction with her work, and her inability at times to know if it's good or bad. Edith was always at hand to convince her of its merit and to continue painting. Edith gave Bertha valued criticism of her work and Bertha usually complied with her suggestions. At the same time, Berth could quite regally demand that Edith pack her paintings for exhibition when she was unable to do so. Unfortunately, it seems that none of Edith's responses are available. Unlike Edith, Bertha does not appear to have felt it necessary to keep Edith's letters safely. This fact would also suggest that Bertha did not consider her life and experiences of great biographical significance.

## **THE EVERARD LETTERS: Extracts from letters at the Tatham Art Gallery**

These letters are arranged according to their reference to the subject in bold.

These letters are arranged in numerical order in following sequence of subjects:

EDITH, CHARLES, CHILDREN AND MOTHERHOOD, RELATIONSHIPS AND GENDER, POLITICS AND RACISM, MISSION WORK AND FAITH, LANDSCAPE AND WEATHER, ILLNESS, EXHIBITIONS AND CRITICISM, WORK AND PAINTING.

### Key to letters

The number "L6" refers to the numbers as documented at the TAG. Many are undated.

Where dates are available they will be mentioned. The author precedes the receiver, date and place written (origin). Therefore ? = presumed.

For example: B-E 19.5.27 Bonn? = A letter from Bertha to Edith, date, month, year, possibly from Bonnefoi.

### Key to abbreviations

B=Bertha; Bonn= Bonnefoi; E= Edith; Eng= England; C or CJE= Charles; fam.=family; K or KB= Bury; L= letter; L'draai=Lekkerdraai; Leighton Hse= Leighton House; nd.= no date; R= Ruth; Roz= Rosamund; S or SK= Sebastian.

## **EDITH**

Most of the letters read to date are from Bertha to her sister Edith. In nearly every one Bertha addresses Edith with great affection, for example: "darlingest" or "my love". She often appeals to Edith for advice or justification for action she has taken, for advice about schooling and spiritual matters as she regarded Edith as a spiritual guide or mentor. She took heed of Edith's advice concerning her painting, as well as for her relationships with people. Edith's replies are unfortunately lost. Many of the letters to Edith are poorly punctuated. The sentences flow in a long stream and are perhaps evidence of her thought patterns. She rarely censors her thoughts and some letters contain contradictory information about her stance on things. These letters are not usually dated and the change in her opinions may have

happened over some time as a result of her life experience.

## **CHARLES**

**L6:** B-C nd. Europe?

“...I am being careful and I get nothing much for myself, but if I am over careful with the children at this point they will not benefit by being in Europe and would be better off in Africa”

“... You would laugh to see me helping with love letters, wouldn't you?!” B said she didn't want her girls to be “... fickle rubbish...”

“... Goodbye dearest of dears, yours as ever, B”.

**L13:** B-E 17.4.17 origin?

“...make Charlie offer his services to his country in some capacity or other. Charlie was very insulting to me but he was angry- disconcerted, so I don't complain. I wish we women could do more...”

**L16:** B-E 21.3.17 Bonn

“... Charlie of course blames me for *every* thing, and is as always most disloyal to me. Today I feel almost sinful as I almost hate Charlie. He has been hanging on the necks of the Cowpers all day”

**L24:** B-E nd. Harpenden

“... Charlie is keeping me so short of money just now. I have had to draw on your 60-pounds. Haven't a penny in the bank and have had to borrow off KB 5-pounds. Rather awkward isn't it. Just at Christmas”.

**L31:** B-E nd. origin?

“Charlie does not wish me to insure” [re paintings transportation]

**L41:** B-E 12.6.17, Europe?

“... I am a dreadful burden to you and C...”

“...I see old A... [?] is retiring after 21 years ... Well I have been married twenty...”

**L44:** B-E nd. Europe?

“...CJE’s is not a very nice letter is it. Remember after....he...[illegible] very depressed by it. He must have been to the birthday party just before and the wine would have upset him, it always does. I must be most careful in what I do and say on my return, it’s going to be very difficult for me I fear”

**L47:** B-E 4th? 1917 Bonn

“...He [C] must be roused to think or he will never make a start- I do wish the Everard’s didn’t think they knew all things knowable. Conceit is an awful hindrance. Charlie has been very kind to me during this attack and even got up at night to make up my fire and will not hear of my travelling 2<sup>nd</sup> class as I had intended”.

**L51:** B-C nd. origin perhaps L’draai?

“...I am sorry to be so long away from home but these large canvases always take time. Heaps of love, your own B”.

**L64:** B-E 14<sup>th</sup>? origin?

“...Read and chat to dear Joey [Charles] and make him feel happier for your visit”

[B also requests that another letter be held back from CJE, i.e. Charles, and one from KB]

**L65:** B-C nd. origin perhaps Europe?

Description of travels in Italy, no specific ref to their relationship

**L112:** B-E nd. origin?

“...CJ is better tempered”

**L113:** B-E nd. origin?

“...It has been an awfully trying time for me as CJ has had one of those impossible fits and ended in the usual way. However the storm has broken at last and now he will be better for



some time. I hope. I must make greater efforts, but it is difficult to know how to act. The poor children suffer very much on these occasions and it is for them that I feel so miserable. I must try very hard to keep the spiritual side of life up in this place so crammed with material intents.”

**L131:** Enid Box to Aunt Bertha, 3.11.46

Re: Charles death.

“... must have been a happy release and how thankful you must all feel that uncle only had two days illness in the end. So now all that wonderful family of three sisters and four brothers are reunited again in the Great Communion! And what great examples they’ve left their children, grandchildren and great grandchildren to line up to! In spite of much reparation they were so devoted to each other always and Mother and Margaret so often spoke of dear Uncle Charlie. It will be a great comfort to you that he and Rosamund are together again, and that he could never really realize that she had passed on.”

“... for him it was a wonderful release, that he was spared long years of increasing helplessness and paralysis though he was so brave and patient. He was certainly a worthy descendant of those Everard’s and of our father and all who knew him more the better for it and loved him.”

**L170:** B-fam (E), 28.1.28? Bon

“C has never considered me in the least. Now I insist that I get properly treated”. [Re: employing a new cook at some expense]

“... poor K finds C an awful bear these days. I don’t mind, he used to be quite as bad in the old days. I am glad I don’t get all his temper. I think he must be a bit worried about Barend leaving and this scamp Swartz is coming. It is a dangerous state of affairs but it is useless for me to talk, my advice is never asked and never taken and C *never* tells me anything. How can he expect friendship from me. He won’t be a friend. Let him remain an outsider then. He is angry because we are buying sheep. How does he expect us to pay our expenses if we have no stock to feed on those acres of land. Ridiculous. Perfectly ridiculous.

**L173:** B-E, 10.12.27 Bonn?

“...I translated the notice of Ruth’s art... [illegible]... of Deauville show for CJE and he was much gratified. These newspaper articles please him very much when they are flattering. I hope Ruth will get some at the Independent. I wish she could have them at the Salon and that would really matter except for Charlie and the other folk.

**L177:** B-E 1929, Carolina

“Charlie has been getting on Ruth’s nerves and it is as well that I came out”

### **CHILDREN AND MOTHERHOOD**

**L2:** B-E 9.10.16 Bonn?

“...I don’t know why the children always look sad when I come back. Is it the excitement or is it the effect of my having left them?”.... “C is very much out of temper...”

“Ruth will make a pretty player and will soothe me in my old age...”

**L3:** B-Ruth, Leyton Hse

“...Roz maybe has a chance of being a prefect”

“I was dreadfully cold, I hope you were not”

“...if he makes no move to continue the friendship don’t mind, just regard it as so much experience...” [Re: Arthur]

“I do feel so lonely now you are gone. I can scarcely bring myself to go out the studio. It makes me feel desolate. But not when I ponder the joy of having you busy and happy at Colarossi’s. I have done right haven’t I?”

Sebastian is described as being “slack” at schoolwork.

**L4:** B-Ruth nd. origin?

Roz is described as being depressed again, over-worked, not confident about exams... “I think she is rather hurt because you never mention wanting to see her.”

“Are you eating enough?”

**L6:** B-C nd. Europe?

Ruth is “such a tragedy queen, it kills me to think of all she will suffer and in deed does suffer”... “she sometimes cries so terribly it breaks my heart”

“...poor Roly and naughty little Roz...”

**L25:** B-E 4.3.24 Leyton Hse

“I am anxious to see how Ruth is in health. I hope your anxiety is unfounded”

**L43:** B-E June, Paris

Re: Sebastian: “he is suffering from nerves and needs help”

[he is unlikely to pass matric, and B warns E that he is sensitive to E’s pity]

**L45:** B-E, Sept 1919, Bonn

Sebastian has a temperature and an “intermittent” fever picked up at Isipingo, and gives him quinine.

**L71:** B-E nd (c.1918) origin?

“I am sure we needn’t worry about Ruth’s education- she’ll never do very much, she is too slack.”

**L111:** B-E nd. origin?

“Ruth is just a little animal or bird, possibly a case of arrested development”

Re: Sebastian: “...about spots- make enquiries at once so that electric treatment and where it can be had so that as soon as the exam is over he can have it in London before he sails. He will be so glad to be rid of that annoying disfigurement.”

**L113:** B-E nd. Bonn

“As to whether I shall paint depends on the help I get with the teaching. I could if I had a governess and KB and keep well”.

“It has been an awfully trying time for me as CJ has had one of those impossible fits and

ended in the usual violent way. However the storm has broken at last and now he will be better for some time. I hope. I must make greater efforts - but it is difficult to know how to act. The poor children suffer very much on these occasions and it is for them that I feel so miserable. I must try very hard to keep the spiritual side of life up in this place, so crammed with material intents.”

**L115:** B-E nd. Bonn?

B discusses Sebastian’s broken wrist/arm, veld-sores, and Rosamund’s black eye?

**L116:** B-E nd. origin?

Children are to continue studying English and Zulu until a governess is found for Latin. Tidiness of children’s rooms an issue, and separate bathing facilities arranged.

**L118:** B-E nd. origin?

Sebastian fell off a donkey and broke his left arm above the wrist.

**L138:** KB-E nd. origin?

SK and Julie were coming too but Julie backed out at the last moment. So we just had SK and Robin and SK is not lively at the best of times, and B was nearly in tears by the time we got there, quite nameless [illegible, she had written “depression” but crossed it out] in the afternoon we went for a walk before the everlasting inoculation.”

**L170:** B-fam 28.1.28 Bonn

“...I just sat in the motor as I don’t like crowds and this was a rough crowd of men. Roz was in breeches and so did not look conspicuous. The Boers may think her eccentric but who cares?”

**L171:** B-E 30.5.28 origin?

“Rodney has returned to town...He has been horribly cold and I feel sure is unfaithful and almost [illegible]. Poor girls. I think he must be really bad, he has so often changed his manner to Roz. However friendly Roz has been to the other men she has always remained

the same to him. I fear she will feel it horribly”

“I am feeling depressed in spite of having my leg almost well. Mental and physical things are far more to one than physical”

**L172:** B-E nd. France?

“Roz finds Bonnefoi very unendurable without us.”

Sebastian not keen to study further and will go to agricultural college soon.

“Young Stewart” visits Bonnefoi with Sebastian. He had taken a degree in agriculture at Cambridge, and had 2 or 3 years at practical farming, and was now managing the Tucker’s farm. He was about 28/29, tall and heavy... Scotch with the upturned nose type associated by me with those small caps and kilts, soft weak mouth. Sandy small moustache, spectacles and a slightly Everard-E [illegible] -ish look. Plays the drums at the Jazz Jackals and writes simple tunes and words to fox trots and waltzes and plays harum, harum accompaniment to his own rather feeble singing. Quite pleasant but I judge weak, indolent, his eye up for a soft job or a competent wife. At present he is after Roz but has been on ...various other girls in the district. I hope and believe that Roz will not encourage him. He sings a song of his own making to her dealing with his astonishment at her indifference towards him!!!!...no my dears I do not want Roz to marry such. Rodney is quite otherwise....”

Re: Sebastian: “...I always know when he is troubled just by that way he prefaces his remarks with the emphatic “Mummy!” I am still able to help him. Indeed I must as he has absolutely no-one else. He behaves much less shyly towards men than he used to. Was quite natural to Stewart on Sunday. He despises Stewart and his Oxford manners and voice, and weak face, especially as S is not particularly muscular...but he laughs at S’s jokes and is quite amiable to him”

B suggests to Ruth that she and HH should marry and live apart for six months of the year. “It’s not a conventional thing to do but ought to be feasible. Rod told Roz he thought it a good plan because then married people remained fond of each other and did not quarrel. I



am sure it is best for all people to be separate sometimes. One would be glad if one could be separated from oneself sometimes. If only it were possible!”

B to Ruth: “...I wish you got a more varied selection [of friends]. It is nothing but artists, artists, artists. All or most are such unsatisfactory creatures. Roz says farmers are such dull birds, but S says artists are such rotters and I think so too.”

“I bought a saxophone for Sebastian.”

To Ruth: “...I have an idea it gives local colour to my letter at least I hope you feel it does. I’d like to have a touch or two of the same thing from you. Ede transported me to her little ruddled den by some such remark. How often I ascend those unending stairs! How often I rap upon the studio door (note I pass the den!) And then come hurry... feet and shriek of joy from my Ruth as she crushes me nearly to death with those long arms. When, when, shall I see you? One part is in agony of longing but I must not dwell upon that but rather inject myself with the anaesthetic of present activities and just wait and wait.”

“No my dears, I do not want Roz to marry such. Rodney is quite otherwise. S told me seriously the other day that he hoped his sisters would ‘keep off’ artists and any kind of musician. He would like his Big sister to marry a good businessman well-off and a bit too young! And Roz to marry Rodney whom he likes very much”.

## **RELATIONSHIPS AND GENDER**

**L1:** B-E 19.02.17, Bonn?

B is very disparaging about the Cowpers, about their appearance and class. Describes them as “ill-bred” and her as “an aged bar-maid.”

**L2:** B-E 9.10.16 Bonn?

“...it will be hard for me to be so closely associated with the mass of humanity....I have long felt my inability..[illegible]”

**L3:** B-E nd. Leyton Hse

B had a "powerful row with KB. She will but see my point of view and persists to thinking herself perfection. It is altogether too dreadful sometimes.... I fear she is in... [illegible].... satisfied with herself...every improvement needs well nigh an earthquake to bring it about"

**L15:** B-E 8.3.17, Bonn

B reflects on her incapacity to relate to her fellow creatures en masse.

"...I am boastful or unsympathetic or self regarding and very unhelpful to other people"

"...the crowds bewilder me."

"...more fearful publicity."

"...I began meditating at last but I fear but feebly."

B expresses irritation at the Cowpers again.

**L16:** B-E 21.3.17, Bonn

"...the Coopers [Cowpers?] left and he had a fit of some sort" B was upset by it and felt quite ill.

Discusses her dislike of Mrs Cowper and said that Mr Cowper was a "...lunatic of some sort..." and expresses the desire to get away from Bonnefoi, to camp out at Lake Chrissie.

**L17:** B-E 26.3.17, Bonn

"...went to visit the Robinson's - always a painful duty"

"K is horribly cross again, her temper is deplorable whenever there is work on hand"

**L20:** B-E 13<sup>th</sup>? Bonn

B discusses Ella's bad temper; her raging about the High Church, says Ella is a "...terribly bigoted woman"

"... The Cowpers have been here 3 weeks tomorrow - no work done - (needlework, bottled fruit) - worse than KB!"

**L25:** B-E 4.3.24, Leyton Hse,

B caught the gardener stealing a plum tree and was disappointed by his dishonesty when she had thought him so fine, she finds herself “contemplating theft occasionally, small thefts but still theft”

**L46:** KB-E, nd. L'draai

B longs for peace and quiet.

**L49:** B-E 1.5.17 Skurwekop?

Re: Isipingo: B hates crowds and boarding houses.

**L64:** B-E 14<sup>th</sup>? origin?

“I do not agree with KB’s letter. She is slushy towards herself and undiscerning towards me.”

**L83:** B-E, 14.9.20/5/6? [difficult to read] Europe?

“HH came round to sketch and Ruth sat by him whilst he sat and worked! Just a couple of hours. He may see her on Thursday and perhaps for a few minutes today. How gracious and almost generous of him. Preserve me from hatred.”

**L95:** B-E? nd. England?

Re: Ruth’s beau: HH who wished he had the violence and abandon of Gauguin and John.

“...he makes me think of a small sneaky cowardly little school boy envying the aplomb of a masterful bully. And then he is such a disagreeable man, hating women and despising them, and all the time wanting all the good things they have to offer. If I did not feel that Ruth would suffer too much, I have it in my heart to smash that idol so that she can see the rubbish it is built of. I do feel so angry and I hate being where I am obliged to be more or less amiable to the brute if I meet him.”

**L101:** B-E nd. Europe?

“K’s want of method and dirty habits disgusts people and they get careless in consequence”

**L105:** B-E, nd. origin?

B refs to KB as a “water-beetle darting about”

**L106:** B-E nd. origin?

“...it’s awful living in such a public place as this” [Re: Ruth’s new studio, had gallery built on?]

**L112:** B-E nd. Bonn?

“Neither the van de Merwe’s nor the Porson’s will allow the boys to come to night school. I told Barend what I thought of such an un-Christian attitude.”

**L138:** KB-E nd. origin?

B saw Dr Henderson again today “and he makes her feel much better”

“...Julie in and awful temper yesterday. We shall be glad to be away from her. If they were staying I am sure there would be still another divorce”

**L153:** B-E nd. Bonn?

“Of course for effect I ought to be quite ill but I am so glad to feel better I can’t stop to think of the effect. I feel I could do marvels when I am better but will go slow to please you.”

**L155:** B-E nd. Isipingo?

B complains that Mr Thornton had spoiled them by taking the family on various outings and insisted paying for everything, and that “it was all a bit too much...although I liked him very much still I felt always that he spent too much money on us”

**L170:** B-fam, 28.1.28, Bonn

“I never read letters in order to get an artistic thrill. If my letters give you that then it is quite an accident. I write as I think. My letters have been lately one long groan but that is just self expression. I am groaning. Life is so much more complicated and I have lost a certain interest which youth gives. But if I again groan take it lightly. I had ought to be more

courageous”.

Re: argument with KB: “...KB always tries to hinder any work that awful spirit of opposition never desires to help anyone. Always wants her own way, always wants to boss. Oh! She is a trial...”

Re: discussion about the Adamses: “...I was mad with the Adamses because except for the service at L'draai he did nothing, nothing. I mean in the way of kraal visiting. The fact is he is not at all religious, only interested in collecting copy for some silly book and in organising finance. There isn't a particle of Christ about him. He felt I did not care for him in the end and that I disapproved utterly of his attitude. I did not give him the money I collected from the church (4-pounds about) but am sending it to the Diocesan Fund. This annoyed him horribly. The fact is I couldn't trust him, he is much too grasping. Besides all the people contributing thought it was for the white man's church so why deceive them. Besides I hate the natives even more than I hate most (not legible) so why give them that money. I was glad when I heard the Adamses go off. I did not enjoy that visit one bit. He is such a terribly worldly sensual conscienceless creature and she's just as sensual and otherwise ordinary, without his brains. I am so sick of the church, don't even want to see another clerical member. They all seem utter humbugs or else complete asses, generally sentimental ones. So that is finished for life. Unfortunately I have Bishop Karney coming in March. It will be difficult for me to endure.”

“...I just sat in the motor as I don't like crowds and this was a rough crowd of men. Roz was in breeches and so did not look conspicuous. The Boers may think her eccentric but who cares?”

**L172:** B-E nd. Bonn-France?

“It is this that makes the trouble for we have to employ women-oh! How I detest native women when I have to get work out of them. They are paid 1/- a day and food but they grumble and dispute as though they were slaves. They are so slow that it is a costly business getting those rough acres cut. However with 9 women and seven boys we have cut a



considerable number of bundles and carried and stacked about 400"

"...No my dears, I do not want Roz to marry such. Rodney is quite otherwise. S told me seriously the other day that he hoped his sisters would 'keep off' artists and any kind of musician. He would like his Big sister to marry a good businessman well-off and a bit too young! And Roz to marry Rodney whom he likes very much."

**L173:** B-E 10.12.27 Bonn?

Re Rosamund's affairs: "aren't men odd? They expect a woman to be completely devoted awaiting their gracious word. If the word never comes what then?" [Rodney had accused Roz of being a flirt].

"Roz is just at the age when she really wants to marry and so I have no doubt some one will get her. It seems so awful to think that this choice must be final, I wonder whether it ought to be? I am beginning to wonder about this as I do about many things".

## **POLITICS AND RACISM**

**L1:** B-E 19.2.17 Bonn?

"...filled with British wrath in my heart and told old Liesl a few truths but am also too much Russian to see it through".

**L4:** B-E nd. origin?

Re: Polling day: "...I could have had a vote. I did not know I was entitled to one until the very day. I am sorry to have missed the chance, but really could not have gone out I had a horrid sort of chill which laid me low."

**L13:** B-E 17.4.17

"make Charlie offer his services to his country in some capacity or other. Charlie was very insulting to me but he was angry and disconcerted so I don't complain. I wish we women could do more. Ought I give up my family and do war work. Let you have some of my family and me go East or somewhere where there is need? Do tell me..."

“.... didn’t want to go to Durban this winter whilst this horrible war is raging. We ought to deny ourselves...”

[B asks if she should she go round “recruiting”.]

[She tried to paint but misgivings about her duty interfered with her work.]

**L25:** B-E, 4.3.24, Leyton Hse

B still worried about the “Joseph problem” [the two farm boys didn’t get on], B was sending Joseph back “as he will not improve by staying.” B requests details about Fort Hare as an option.

**L30:** B-E sat before Whitsunday, before S’s 8<sup>th</sup> birthday, Isipingo

“These Durbanites seem to do a great deal of war work. I feel once more that I am not doing enough, but that Bazaar did me up...so I must be cautious how I take on war work and I feel so helplessly lazy don’t want to do anything. No time for my own...”

**L36:** C-Roz 7.4.43, Bonn

Charles mentions the destruction caused by the war in England.

**L38:** Julie-Nicolaas 10.11.42, Alberton

“...ja lyk my die kaffirs word ‘n kwessie. Ek wonder of Doornhoek nie klein kaffertjies is nie, ek dink hulle word baie gesteek daar.”

*“yes it appears that the kaffirs are becoming problematic. I wonder if Doornhoek wasn’t caused by young kaffirs, I think many of them are being bitten/infected there” (candidates translation)*

**L39:** Swazi police-Nicolaas Steenkamp, 15.9.42, origin?

Re: stock theft of one white and one black ox.

**L44:** B-E nd. Europe?

B expresses anti war sentiments and says: "I am very bewildered"

**L48:** KB-E 1.5.17 Bonn

B decides to take Mapunu [?] to Isipingo. This was possibly a trusted black male servant.

**L65:** B-C, nd. Italy

"...the streets are thronged with people. Masses of humanity crowding the narrow streets and filling the square in front of the cathedral"

Re: Italian men: "...They are the most indecent nation. Incredibly indecent. A native would be scandalized"

**L74:** B-E nd. Bonn?

"I wish we could inoculate our poor kaffirs but there just isn't any stuff for them nor can one buy it for them. By the way how do we pay for the serum. I believe it is a huge price".

**L83:** B-E 14.9.1920/5/6 origin?

"...What a row is going on in China"

**L112:** B-E? nd. Bonn?

"... We opened the native school last night. Monday. Twenty turned up, but so far not one child. However the boys are most important. Josias was very pleased."

"Mapungo is being naughty about dirt and flies. The kitchen is unbearable."

"I can hear the boys coming home from school. How late for the poor things to walk all the way from Brakspruit isn't it?"

"I am very sorry to hear that May is going home next year. I hope all the nice people aren't going to leave the country."

**L115:** B-E nd. Bonn?

"... The teacher Josias came-on [sic] he arrived seven in the evening. Short, thick set with a smooth fat face and nice expression. Quiet and well-behaved. Speaks four languages. Is a Basuto. Lost his wife during the epidemic. Educated by Archdeacon Fogarty and some of

that lot in the Free State. Father a Christian before he was born. Means to become a catechist but is not yet one. Is delighted with the place and school but discouraged by the apathy amongst the natives here. However I addressed a meeting on Saturday (Josiah is a splendid interpreter has sometimes worked for the Bishop). I raged at the ma poks [sic], threatened to take Josias away and settle him down at Lekkerdraai. If they don't hurry up."

**L170:** B-fam 28.1.28 Bonn

"but the Boers are all alike. Spend nothing and desire nothing but a good bank account. They are extraordinarily like the Scotch."

"these days I *loath* talking Afrikaans to these Boers. It is always about *sikte* [*siekte* or sickness] how do you spell the stupid stuff."

"I may go in to the bazaar held in and at the SAP party not that I care about the party - all African parties are untrustworthy but maybe it is better than the nationalists. I also may see Stewart, I ought to support him as he is English and a gentleman."

"Nelson our cook has just gone. Rodney wired about another and I wired back 'please engage cook. Health essential' because this one is full of disease. Rod said he'd get him medically examined. He will be 5 pounds a month but I cannot and will not be bothered as I tend to be. C has never considered me in the least. Now I *insist* that I get properly treated."

**L172:** B-Ruth nd. origin?

"... The Batemans are coming to stay a night with us...perhaps you remember she is an amiable little half-caste (woolly) not 'received' by most. Bateman is a superior sort of storekeeper who has seen his..." [illegible, possibly "mistakes"]

"...Tom consented to take us to Carolina. He took his native with him and he had the *native* sitting in front. Well Everard's are Everard's. I only wish my name were not the same. Tom morose all the way..."

**L178:** B-E 1929 Johannesburg

"I saw the girl Rodney Bridges is engaged to. Just a Jewish type of shop girl good looking

but a very large face and square and short body. Much more his class. I *am* glad Roz is not seeing him anymore”

## **MISSION WORK AND FAITH**

**L7:** B-E nd. Cape Town

“I am feeling very happy about my natives [illegible] experiment”

**L64:** B-E nd. origin?

“forgive the poor brown folk any of their short-comings. It is hard fro us to keep upon the tight/right rope. Well nigh impossible for them. They who positively love sin can scarcely be expected to avoid it”

B was reading Euripides, Iphegnea and Tauris: “... wonderful stuff Euripides! Full of the gloom of unlighted darkness. How dark 415BC must have been. The thing that is amazing is that in spite of the darkness they could still see. Even with our great Light, one is so blind.”

**L76:** B-E nd. Bonn?

“Our children sang two hymns in kaffir quite beautifully. ‘The King of Love’ and ‘All hail the power of Jesus’ name’. I shall teach them psalms and hymns in kaffir daily it is a splendid thing to do. Also Ruth is going to do reading and dictation daily. She *shall* know Zulu. So the spirit forces me a poor weak vessel to carry living water to the heathen. My poor brown children. I really do love them. Their joy at getting prayer books is wonderful. All the greater because they have had to wait a year.”

“... Why did our Lord use earth and spittal to open the eyes of the man born blind? Why is a reward offered to those who keep the 5<sup>th</sup> commandment? And for no other? Mr Bell said such questions as the first didn’t interest him, he never tried to read meanings like that into the Bible. I asked him how he ‘searched’ to find but he answered nothing.”

**L112:** B-E nd. Bonn?



“... We opened the native school last night Monday. Twenty turned up, but so far not one child. However the boys are the most important. Josias was very pleased.”

**L113:** B-E nd. origin?

“I have been preparing my kaffir sermon for next week. Am taking the Gospel for the 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Ep., as there are no more Trinity Sundays. I thought that parable a good one for my boys.”

“oh I wish I could speak to them in my own language. I wish I could get a little more help. I feel a stupid old thing. If they all understood Dutch it wouldn't be so bad but not half do. Father Hill is slow about sending a hymn book or two.”

**L115:** B-E nd. Bonn?

[See elsewhere for long quote about Josias J Mofokeng.]

**L116:** B-E nd. Bonn?

“K service just over. I feel nearly in tears about it. Somehow I couldn't make them understand about the gospel. John 2:1 or at least I felt I did it very badly.”

**L170:** B-fam nd. Bonn

[See elsewhere for long quote about Mr and Mrs Adams.]

**L172:** B-E nd. origin?

“I don't think the natives have souls or at least not many of them and if they have they are not worth bothering over. There I have said it. Why should I worry over these silly [illegible] I don't believe in any of it. Dirty degraded lazy wholly unspiritual why worry over them. God creates them as he creates so many apparently wasted material. They have their uses, but I cannot feel that at this present stage of development they can be part of a Christian household. Only a few of them and those are the ones who make their own personal effort. I hate to think of the Bishop coming down here and all the fuss of [illegible] confirmation, marriages etc and not believing that a single one is worthy of it. I simply must put a stop to

it. I shall tell Mr Adams that I don't believe in the Bantu soul anymore than the rest of his acquaintances. I don't believe in anybody having a soul unless a monstrous effort is made on the part of the creature. No soul exists in the vast majority of human beings. No soul in Horace or his like. No soul in thousands of respectable folk. One can only hope that they will make reasonably good manure when they depart this life. I shall not do more myself unless I exert myself to grow at least a tiny soul here and now. I often fear that my poor seedling soul will wilt and die, it gets so poorly watered and [illegible] that I have entered into this fury of hate towards the deadly lethargy of the average man. I feel my poor seedling soul has less chance than ever. But it is impossible for me to believe in my fellow man and their souls just because I wish to grow one for myself. There is the fact. I do not care for my neighbours and I do not care if they only become so much manure after death. I often think this one life is far too good for them I cannot make myself desire *anything whatever* for them in a future state. This is I suppose complete hatred. Edie dear you will be agonised by what I say but I must purge my heart of deceit. It is just *vanity* for me to go on with mission work. I do not really call for all these dirty deceitful lazy unlovely native brats. I am always glad when they die. I do not want them to be born. I wish that they could cease to reproduce themselves as indeed I wish the greater number of white people could also. What good are they. None. A great hindrance to progress. Unless they do work which is just muscular but even so I would far rather intelligent energetic white people could do it. Well fortunately for the world I am not an over Lord [sic]. Oh! How I *detest* people. These natives are so well treated by S and also by me. They see our goods *rot* rather than lift a hand to help. They don't care a damn for us and I don't care a *damn* for them. I am sick of the whole crowd. May they rot in their own ignorance. I shall just give up the whole concern. Never will I work for them anymore. Therefore I am no Christian. I *cannot* love my enemy. I *cannot*. I wish him dead. I wish him non-existent."

**L177:** B-E 1929 Lekkerdraai

"... We had four padres at Lekkerdraai all at once. Father Hill. Father Hepsworth. Mr Tonkin and the native priest. The outcome of much talk between Father Hill and the natives chiefly Jeremy and the priest is that Father Hill has "ordered" *me* to leave the whole thing alone as the natives object to my way of going on!!! !!! Do not get angry and above all do not

write protesting *please* don't. I shall not tell you all the silly details. So I am free of all mission work and so are you. I shall never go with the churches again if I can avoid it. Father Hill is coming down again in July to arrange all details but as for me I don't care what he does or does not do. So ends 14 years of struggle and expense. The congregation at Lekkerdraai has dwindled to two and Bonnefoi practically to nothing but who cares I don't. Mr Tonkin wants me to let him spend his holiday at Lekkerdraai this winter and I suppose I must. He brings his adopted son (aged 11/17?) with him..."

**L182:** B-E nd. origin?

"All human effort is valuable if it is directed God-ward. That sounds very cheap but I mean perhaps more than that. I am not very well today, in bed (usual) and so writing and my ideas are both muddled."

## **LANDSCAPE AND WEATHER**

Bertha frequently remarks on the weather in her correspondence. These quotes usually have some special significance or perception of the landscape.

**L5:** B-Ruth nd. Europe?

"I get great attacks of wanting to be at Lekkerdraai looking towards my beloved hills and dear old cruel Twantwanie."

**L24:** B-E nd. Leyton Hse

"I see [say/sede?] disorders have a way of making me see the most vivid colours as black, haven't they."

**L63:** B-E 10.6.24 Eng

"She [Ruth] will soon tire of this deadly green wet country."

"I went for a stroll yesterday and felt quite depressed by the monotony and cold wetness. France can't be quite so bad can it? Or is it just as chilly and just as green. There are greenest greens. This place is as monotonous as the heart of a cabbage."

**L95:** B-E nd. Eng

“we have had glorious moonlight nights”

“for a tame life this is quite a tasty little place. But oh! It’s tame and I’m not and I don’t believe Ruth is either. It’s only a passing phase in her make-up. It is so new and unplumbed for her. I ache with old associations.”

**L104:** B-E nd. origin?

“Isn’t England sad in autumn? Quite too sad. All the past ages seem to roll back on her like the returning sea to a tidal river. I always feel haunted when I watch the sea roll back along the desolate mud flats and the same feeling comes over me in early autumn. Perhaps there is some connection.”

On missing Edith: “this being in such widely distant continents tries me dreadfully. It’s just possible for the young but not bearable for you and me. Perhaps something will happen and we shall be allowed to be together. We must not fret. I shall never be happy if you are a long way off [illegible] scarcely [illegible] if you are not in the same place. You have meant so much to me and as age creeps on more.”

**L111:** B-E nd. Europe?

“... Whew it is hot in this old glass house. If I were watered I should sprout. Like a weed in a forcing house here at Kew. I suppose I am getting acclimatized for the equator.”

**L113:** B-E nd. Bonn

B mentions a partial eclipse, and hailstorms.

Re C’s temper: “... however the storm has broken at last and now he will be better for some time. I hope.”

**L155:** B-E nd. Isipingo?

“Do you know I almost hate the sea. It’s so noisy and always seems so engrossed in its own commotion.”

**L172:** B-Ruth nd. Bonn?

B went to see a waterfall ["miniature Vic Falls"] on a farm at Buffel's spruit, and describes it thus: hurtling torrent, quite wonderful, raging thundering theatrical sky; a deep hole called the boiling point; enormous clouds and violent thunderstorm. "I thought of Ruth and wondered whether she would be moved to paint. I was as the lines were most rhythmical...a rhythm of force both in hue and colour. Very lovely. Now don't urge me to paint dear Edie! Cannot possibly just now. All my efforts-I am not too energetic... I don't suppose the world misses me - the art world I mean to judge by the sale of Delville Wood it certainly doesn't."

**L182:** B-E nd. origin?

"... This farm should prove a fruitful place but we can never be sure of savage old Africa"

B describes the landscape at Badplaatz in glowing terms despite the discomfort of the simple dwelling.

"It has been pouring all night. And this morning is heavy and grey and full of aching dampness. How terribly one feels wetness in this country. Four years of drought is completely obliterated after two days of rain. ...Terrible old Africa. What a midge man seems in this fierce setting..."

"I am now sitting in the motor for comfort and privacy and have read my letter aloud being out of earshot of the manager (at last). Anyway beyond the now livid green veld are the jagged blue hills of Swaziland and on one side the nearer krantzes and headlands of the highveld. The only noise is the noise we make ourselves. An overwhelming silence broods over this world when one sits alone. I like to sit alone for a few minutes but I could not bear it for long. Such an unfettered setting should produce calm but alas! Alas! for fretful Birdie. Worse than any dung beetle I be."

**ILLNESS**

In nearly every letter written by B to E or family, she mentions her current illness, whether it was a chill, toothache, a bad leg, sleeplessness or depression. Frequently after mentioning



that she is unwell, she makes light of it, or tells them not to worry unduly.

**L16:** B-E 21.3.17 Bonn

Coopers had left: “he had a fit of some sort, behaved like a madman...” B was upset by this (tearful) and as a result “felt quite ill.”

**L30:** B-E nd. Isipingo

Re: Mr Adams and Mr Paton’s visit: “I managed to get through the day despite being convalescent. It was nice talking to arty people once more”.

B has “no energy to paint” although she admits that [I] “have had much less pain, in fact all day I have had no pain at all. I hope I shall keep like this”

**L32:** B-E nd. Bonn?

B refers to toothache again, and says that she “will take a great dose of oil so as to be quite fit when you come. I have been seedy of late, no doubt owing to teeth.”

**L46:** KB-E nd. L’draai

KB refers to B as “fairly well but overtired”, and that B longs for peace and quiet.

**L47:** B-E 1917 Bonn

B had been very depressed prior to being sick [an attack of pleurisy], “a mild attack” and neuralgia.

B also refers to her preference for Isipingo rather than Durban, as she hates the crowds at Durban.

**L48:** KB-E 1.5.17 Bonn

B is ill again, wont “go” till she has [illegible]. B is taking Dr. Loud’s tonic [a stimulant] and is being nursed with great care.

**L49:** B-E 1.5.17 Bonn

B refers to her hatred of crowds and boarding houses, that she is feeling “poorly” again, and

has sore chest.

**L79:** B-E nd. origin?

“I didn’t work yesterday because I was both tired and depressed past expression. I felt quite hopeless about my picture. I know that I am wrong because it is largely my pride that is killing me. Of course I like to succeed for the sake of the thing itself but I fear I hate failing to a great extent because of the ignominy. It appears to me to be awful to have had all the money and trouble spent on my work and then for me return and say I can’t do it. I ought to love my abjection but I don’t one little bit. Today I worked so hard and so late that I could not take a final look to see what I had done.”

“I am almost too tired to write even this note for I’ve been struggling with that picture from dawn to dusk, literally, and that in the face of great odds sometimes drenching rain and always wind enough to shave one’s eyelashes off and very low temperatures all day. Oh! Dear! Shall I pull it through? Perhaps it will be just good enough to cheat the public but I doubt it will ever please you. I am now in such a bewildered state that I don’t know bad from good.” [Perhaps this was written before going to England as she speaks of passages being booked.]

“... Why do you ask me to paint pictures if you know the world doesn’t want them? You who do have nowhere to hang them. Silly old Edie. Cinemas and cars are what the world wants why paint pictures? Don’t send this on to Ruth”

**L105:** ? nd. origin?

B makes frequent references to her increased weight. She visits a specialist who tells her that her leg will never be normal again, either stiff, strong and no pain, or movement without strength and some pain.

**L115:** ? nd. origin?

“yes I am a bit off colour too though. I hate saying so a bit throaty and cheap”

**L117:** ? nd. origin?

“have been dreadfully depressed so no doubt the trip to Lekkerdraai will cheer me up. ...I am not at all ill, only depressed after the picture fiasco”

**L138:** KB-E nd. origin?

“B was not very well yesterday. Was depressed Saturday night and Sunday longed for H.G poort dam”

“B was restless and depressed and I think she wants a change before settling down”

“Dr B came this morning and he is going to see if he can’t reduce her to one insulin injection a day. She wants to go down to Bonnefoi.”

“B was too depressed to look at pictures.” [At the galleries in town.]

“B wants to go out and will not stop talking”

“B was terribly depressed yesterday but today she’s much better-she has thought out her own salvation. She is going to Dr. B this afternoon and will persuade him that what she should have is a change by the sea. L.A. by preference as it is warm and free from visitors just now. Of course she would not dream of moving without her family.”

“...she can get her injections from a doctor down there. She is fearfully keen about it and has cheered her up immensely”

**L139:** KB-E and Ruth Norman Nursing Home nd.

Much detail about B’s behaviour in nursing home, still having insulin and taking medicine to calm her nerves and sleep, as a result she was groggy in the morning but quieter, after altercations with Julie, Sebastian’s wife. B is easily overwrought, highly anxious and easily aroused, cannot sleep or relax. Seems to eat well with KB’s help and encouragement. Appears very dependent and crotchety. B is very fond of young priest, and spends time speaking to him, finding out all about him/his life, etc.

“but it was all too much for B. I got her some Bovril at once. But she had a return of this frightful irritation, the one she has had at the nursing home and also the worst she has had at all. We couldn’t get hold of her chief sister [presumably to bath her?] Fortunately she was

moderately quick and got some ice which finally stopped it. She was reduced to a pip. I managed to get her to eat all her supper, she had her insulin injection to work off.”

“she is taking small doses of—— [KB leaves a space, no name given] to quieten her nerves and she has slept well”

**L156:** B-E 1919 origin?

“I got a very light touch of sun which made me partially deaf for hours...odd!”

**L171:** B-E 30.5.28 Bonn?

“I am feeling depressed in spite of having my leg almost well. Mental things are far more to one than physical”

**L172:** B-E nd. origin?

“I have been feeling quite depressed, no doubt owing to my glands but partly with reason. I will anyhow explode so that I may be able to recover”

**L179:** B-E 1929, L'draai

“I don't know whether the [illegible] gland pills [illegible] sent me - I feel so cross and depressed now that I'm taking them, terribly irritable. I am not taking them regularly because I can't remember to do it.”

## **EXHIBITIONS/CRITICISM**

**L21:** Account from A.J. Fitzmaurice, Art Photographer, dated 27.12.23

Charges for mounting and three frames, including “Piece [sic] of Winter”

**L43:** B-E nd. Paris

Discusses shows success for E or B? And refers to “Otto Beit is the man that buys such a lot for Joburg. I wonder he did not buy DW for the memorial....It may not be good art but its quite good history.”

## **WORK AND PAINTING**

**L1:** B-E 19.2.17 origin?

Discusses embroidering of banner for Eunice School.

**L2:** B-E 9.10.16 origin?

B expresses desire to practise violin

B-Ruth: "I feel I cannot help a great deal as I have never painted from the life." [Possibly life drawing from a nude model.]

**L27:** B-E 1917 Skurwekop

"... We had a glorious expedition day yesterday in honour of my having finished my picture.....twas so lovely and refreshing after my agonising work..."

[B also discusses technique here, but the letter is for the most part illegible.]

**L28:** B-E nd. Skurwekop

"the awful picture is packed too although its still wet"

[B discusses technique: she says she had painted "too thickly" and perhaps over "half-dried under-colour".]

**L29:** B-E 1917, Bonn

"my picture doesn't look so bad hanging in the hall but it is very unlike my work. Much more faint and timid. I did not after all alter the scheme so it is much more your picture than mine. You never answered my important question about the smoke that I want to put in the distance."

**L30:** B-E nd. Isipingo

"you must get my pictures packed at once and I will wire you if I can't get them free on rail or [illegible]. Paton doesn't quite know when the show will be whether in a fortnight or not for six weeks."



**L49:** B-E 1.5.17 Bonn

B discusses technique: scumbling, dried badly, repainted.

**L56:** Lezard & Co govt auctioneers-B, 25.7.17

Invitation to give details of work for a lecture and slide show to be given at various centres such as Durban, Port Elizabeth, Johannesburg, Cape Town, East London and other inland towns. Other artists to be included were: Roworth, Spilhaus, Goodman, H. Naude, P. Wenning, G.S. Smithard, Amschewitz, Wallace Paton and B. Everard. Wanted details of B's work: three from early work, and wanted personal views and ideas.

**L65:** B-Charles nd Europe?

"I have called my Opal Valley "Looking Eastwards Towards Swaziland, Transvaal". I wanted to locate it"

**L79:** B-E nd. origin?

"I didn't work yesterday because I was both tired and depressed past expression. I felt quite hopeless about my picture. I know that I am wrong because it is largely pride that is killing me. Of course I like to succeed for the sake of the thing itself but I fear I hate failing to a great extent because of the ignomy [sic]. It appears to me to be awful to have had all the money and trouble spent on my work and then for me to return and say I can't do it. I ought to love my abjection but I don't one little bit. Today I worked so hard and so late that I could not take a final look to see what I had done."

"I'm almost too tired to write even this note for I've been struggling with that picture from dawn till dusk, literally, and that in the face of great odds sometimes drenching rain always wind enough to shave one's eyelashes off and very low temperatures all day. Oh! Dear! Shall I pull it through? Perhaps it will be just good enough to cheat the public but I doubt it will ever please you. I am now in such a bewildered state that I don't know bad from good."

**L117:** B-E nd origin?

“I have been dreadfully depressed no doubt the trip to Lekkerdraai will cheer me up. I am not at all ill, only depressed after the picture fiasco”

**L137:** The Print Shop-E Johannesburg, nd.

Dealers in etchings, woodcuts, paintings, drawings and colour prints etc. Itemises colour prints made [not specified which were coloured]:

Prints:

6 Peace of Winter (BE) @ 1.10

6 Banks of the Komati (BE) @ 1.10

3 Delville Wood (BE) @ 1.1-

6 Captive (RK Everard) @ -12.6 [?]

Linocut

1 St Thomas (ELM King) @ - 1.6

Post Card

1 The Captive (RKE) @ --.9. [?]

All sales subject to a commission of 33.33%

**L172:** B-E nd. origin?

“I have decided never to show any more pictures anywhere in Africa. No one even likes my best work and the other is too stale now”

## **APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEW**

## INTERVIEW

This questionnaire was compiled in September 2001 and given in text form to Leonora Everard Haden so that she might answer the questions at her leisure. Her handwritten responses have subsequently been recorded here. Additional information obtained by the candidate in later conversation is indicated by square brackets [ ]. The information contained in this interview is referred to in the dissertation as personal comment from Leonora Everard Haden, and it's abbreviated form reads as (pers com LEH 2001).

**Q1:** Bertha's mother Mary King died in 1907. Where and under what circumstances? Did either Bertha or Edith have any contact with her after her visit to South Africa at Ruth's birth?

A: My mother remembers her when she was three years old. I think she [Mary] died in SA [South Africa] after an operation to remove a goiter. She died from post-operative infection. My mother loved her and spoke about her with admiration. She did not speak much about her personal life. I know nothing about her parents. She had a blonde sister who was also called Ruth. But Bertha only found out later.

**Q2:** Both Charles and Rosamund died in 1946. Charles was already 93 years old. Was he aware of the circumstances of her death and how did he respond?

A: I don't remember if he was greatly affected. His memory was going (short-term) so I assume he would only have been affected after a short time after he heard about Rosamund's death.

**Q3:** It appears that Bertha stopped painting seriously quite early. Why was this so? She had always led a busy life, and despite this managed to find/make time for painting. Did Rosamund's death have anything to do with it? Had her health deteriorated greatly by then?

A: For one thing she had to run the numerous farms, and during the war 3000 sheep and

Afrikander cattle. The farms stretched from Kwaggafontein, Hebron, Bloemfontein, Skoonwater to Boschoek, Lekkerdraai, Badplaas, Middleveld, 56 km. She also owned a house in Mbabane so that Bryan and I could go to school at St Marks. Edith looked after us most of the time. But Bertha and Katherine would come down for quite long periods.

**Q4:** I have not been able to find out anything about Yolande Robin, daughter of Sebastian and Juliette Everard. No birth dates are given. Is she still alive, and if so, where does she live and does she have any interest in art?

A: Sebastian and Julie had two daughters, Robyn 7 years younger than me. She and her husband live with Sebastian and Julie since they have become frail. Julie wants to write a book on Rosamund, she knew her well. Yolande Fulton, 12 years younger than me, is married and lives in Vancouver. She paints and takes art lessons.

**Q5.** Your son Stephen died at an early age. Would you mind telling me something about him?

A: [Stephen was born in Pietermaritzburg on the 27<sup>th</sup> August, 1969, Nicky at Carolina, on the 29<sup>th</sup> April, 1966, Alana at Kitwe in 1964, in Zambia, and Leonora on the 12<sup>th</sup> December 1937]. Stephen was in a motorbike accident, which left him partially disabled. He committed suicide later.

**Q6:** Does your youngest daughter Andrea have any interest in art? What does she do?

A: Andrea studied Architecture in Durban, now lives in London (born 31 January 1972, PMB, now 29 years old).

**Q7:** Edith never married. As a well-educated, intelligent and attractive woman one would presume this was by choice, rather than force of circumstance. Did she have any suitors at all and if so why did she choose to remain single?



A: [Henry, her half-brother did not approve of an early suitor.]

**Q8:** Was there any evidence of artistic talent in Charles's family? Not necessarily an established artist, but perhaps some flair in a related field?

A: [A nephew is an architect in London.]

**Q9:** Was there ever any competitiveness between Edith and Bertha in relation to their art, physical appearance or family relationships?

A: [Bertha depended on Edith, Bertha was sometimes condescending.]

**Q10:** Did Bertha ever mention her responses or awareness of other female artists of her time? She made some derisive comments about other female English painters (Harmsen, 1980 The Women of Bonnefoi), but I can find nothing to suggest she knew of Stern, Laubser or Sumner, for example.

A: [Bertha knew Allerly Glossop, Walter Battiss and also Moses Kottler.]

**Q11:** Bertha married quite late in life. By Late Victorian standards, she might have been described as a spinster. Was this perhaps a consideration in her decision to marry Charles after so short a time? As an attractive woman, she must have had admirers previously. Charles was much older than her, and perhaps signified some sort of paternal figure. Was it a marriage of convenience or love, or both?

A: Probably both.

**Q12:** Bertha appears to have had little interest in money, which she described as "vulgar", although her frequent travels necessitated substantial amounts. However, her efforts at sheep rearing and related activities during her marriage to Charles bear witness to her awareness and criticism of Charles' apparently lackadaisical approach to their financial

welfare. Would you like to comment?

A: No comment we never spoke about money.

**Q13:** Bertha's dislike of the Cowpers (farm hand and especially his wife) was intense. Was this a class issue or a personal one? Very little is written about her friendships with other women in the area (Carolina), although Mrs Campion remembers that her mother, Mrs Pringle, was a friend of hers. Would you like to comment?

A: Have no idea. I think she would have tended to have closer English friends, the Snoeks, and the Fergussons and Mrs Cross in Carolina, the Tayntons on a nearby farm.

**Q14:** Although Charles managed the store and acquired a succession of farms, Bertha complained of being held on a rather short fiscal leash during their stay in Europe. Why was this so? Was Bertha demanding more than necessary or was Charles short of money or was he perhaps hoping to curtail their travels?

A: No, he showed maturity and I am sure he would not have tried to stop their travels.

**Q15:** Kathleen Bury played an important role in Bertha's life. From her first visit as assistant nurse and governess, she stayed on with the family until her death, nursing and caring for the children and Bertha herself, especially towards the end of Bertha's life. However, Bertha was often very disparaging about her. What kind of woman was Miss Bury? Apparently she had some income of her own, and helped out financially at times.

A: She was very practical. Saw to the catering and spent a lot of time in the large Bonnefoi kitchen. They had about 6 servants. She was also a keen gardener. We always had three-course meals.

**Q16:** I am curious to find out about Edith and Bertha's response to the Jews. According to some of the letters I have documented, a number of Jews attended Eunice, and Edith

remarked on how well they had “turned out”. Judaism was not tolerated very well by many of their contemporaries, and were perceived as anti-Christian and therefore didn’t socialise with them. Any comments?

A: I have no recollection of them making any adverse comments about Jews. In fact when I was a child a Jewish husband and wife came to stay at Bonnefoi with their daughter whom I entertained and played with at the age of 7 years. My mother’s best friends were Jews in Paris: Farass [?] was an artist then and Jewish.

**Q17:** What happened to the two young black boys, Joseph and Josiah (I think), whom Bertha took to England to further their education? How did she select them from amongst the other farm boys?

A: When John and Joseph returned, the blacks were jealous and resented them. Joseph was murdered. John was given poison that sent him temporarily mad. John ended up as a domestic at Bonnefoi and also a catechist at the church on the farm. He died when his horse and cart were found in the Komati pool at Lekkerdraai. People suspected that he and his wife were murdered and it was made to look as though the horses and cart had fallen over the cliff. I have some carvings that John made.

**Q18:** How did Bertha hear about Rosamund’s death? Did she attend the funeral? I believe Rosamund was buried in England. What was Bertha’s reaction? (It appears that Bertha often became physically ill when she was emotionally upset).

A: I think Sebastian broke the news. Bertha was shattered, and my mother says could have gone insane if it hadn’t been for me and Bryan. She devoted all her time to educating me and Bryan. The funeral was in England, too far away for her to attend. I think that the physical and mental are so closely interwoven, that it is hard to say. I know that Bertha became ill after every major painting. In the end she suffered from Diabetes. She had diverticulitis and amoebic dysentery and a duodenal ulcer, which required a large operation. I believe she had meningitis when the children were small. It could only be through great determination that

she was able to achieve so many things. Bertha only decided to get a governess after her leg was badly injured while ploughing. She was bedridden and unable to teach the children. I believe Catherine saw the advert for a governess while in Durban. She was travelling around the world by boat. Catherine loved being with the family, she was cheerful and not self-centred. Bertha felt that Catherine (or Kitty as B called her) was bad-tempered at times. I remember Edith saying that she felt Bertha had become too dependent on Kitty. Edith told me this when they were back in Bonnefoi in 1962.

PS: Catherine did not care much about her looks or how she dressed. She cared more about Bertie, how she dressed and encouraged Bertha in later life to put on make up. And Bertie dressed well, although she had very few clothes. I remember she wore a smart skirt and jacket. Catherine had lovely curly hair which she wore short. But her clothes were not well-fitting.

**Q19:** Bertha describes Charles as a conceited know-it-all. At the time she was angry with him for neglecting her advice or not heeding her opinion. What are your memories of Charles? Was he indifferent to Bertha, or did he tire of her frequent absences or emotional outbursts. Did he regard her painting as an obstacle to their relationship at all, or was their frequent separation necessary to retain the vestiges of what appears to have been a once passionate relationship. Did they live in harmony in old age or did they live separately?

A: I think Charles showed a great deal of maturity. They were opposites. Charles the breadwinner, who was content to run the store and live at Bonnefoi. I remember Bertie saying the first years were tough. She did all the cooking and bread making, while they lived at the back of the store. I don't think that Bertie really liked Bonnefoi. Boschoek and Lekkerdraai was her place.

**Q20:** Charles never seemed to venture far from his home, although there is evidence to support that he did accompany the family on some holidays to the coast. Did he feel excluded from the sisterly bond?

A: I don't think he was the sort of person to experience jealousy, or to feel excluded. After all he had lived a bachelor's life until the age of 50.

**Q21:** Was there a reason, other than the possible mismanagement of his store and farms that kept him from travelling to Europe? Did Charles actively farm the lands himself or did he use managers (Cowpers for example) all the time? Would it be correct to say that his chief interest was in the store, and that he could be described as a "gentleman farmer"?

A: Yes I think he was married to the store. I don't think Charles felt the need to go overseas; also it is almost impossible to leave a store for any length of time. I don't think Charles knew anything about farming and got managers instead.

**Q22:** What was Charles' relationship like with the labourers on the farm? He was obviously a well-liked man among his peers, as the popularity of Bonnefoi attests. Did he have any special male friends (perhaps other than his immediate family and brothers) with whom he could socialise during the family's protracted absences? Who were they?

A: I have no idea. I suggest you ask Bryan Haden, my brother.

**Q23:** Bertha was not always complimentary about her daughters' choice of suitors. Did she approve of Nicolaas Steenkamp and William Haden?

A: She was always fond of my father and supportive of him. I can only assume that Bertie was fond of him. He died when I was small. I loved him as he was warm-hearted and loved children. Bertha always spoke of him.

**Q24:** Where is Nicolaas buried? Who attended the funeral?

A: I went to Vergelegen farm to look for his grave. There is a little graveyard near the house where members of the Steenkamps were buried. But I could not find it. The present owners were very unfriendly, almost aggressive. The farm is about 7km south of Ermelo on the



Emmigratis turn off.

**Q25:** Stock theft seems to have been a problem for many farmers. How did the family address this problem?

A: I never heard them speak about it. I was unaware of any stock theft.

**Q26:** A woman named Mary appears to have bequeathed her small inheritance to Rosamund. Who was this woman? Was it her grandmother?

A: I can only assume it was Mary Littlewood who was (I think) Rosamund's godmother. She was a great friend of Edith's and also wrote poetry.

**Q27:** Was Bertha able to speak a native language sufficiently fluently to write and conduct a sermon in church? She speaks of her anxiety before delivering the sermon, but it is not clear in what language it was conducted.

A: She might have had an interpreter. She would have spoken in English. All her children spoke perfect Swazi. So does Bryan.

**Q28:** Was Edith more fluent in French than Bertha?

A: I have no idea. Bertha taught me French and got the records and books so that Bryan and I could learn French. She felt it important that we learn the language.

**Q29:** Bertha could obviously speak Afrikaans sufficiently well to be conversant in it. Did she befriend any Afrikaans women at all? In her letters, her remarks about the Boers were sometimes disparaging, but these may have been isolated instances where class played a more significant role.

A: She was very friendly with the van der Merwe family. Sagrys van der Merwe has bought

Bonnefoi. His father was Post Master. I think the van Niekerk's were acquaintances. She found the boer farmers rather crude.

**Q30:** What were Bertha's interests in literature? Did she read a lot? Would you know what type of work (novel/biography/etc) she preferred?

A: Yes she did read a lot judging from all the books. Scott, etc. In later years, Catherine would read to her.

**Q31:** The Bible, which Bertha appears to have read with critical intelligence, seems to have been both an inspiration and a source of confusion to her. Did Bertha retain her faith in Christianity after she seems to have lost faith in the worldly signs of it? (I refer here to a letter to Edith in which she complains of the futility of mission work and the impossibility of steering the blacks towards the concept of God.)

A: Yes, she always retained her faith and spent many hours with her prayer book and Bible. She almost became a Catholic, and that is why I was sent to a Catholic school in Johannesburg, for a while, and later went to St Mary's Diocesan School in Johannesburg.

**Q32:** What were the circumstances surrounding Edith's death? How did Bertha respond? Bertha lived only three years after her sister's death. This is common between two lives so interdependent. Was this true in this case?

A: As I mentioned, Edith had not been well in the last years, and ill with bouts of flu. Her heart was not strong. She had a severe stroke in 1962/63, during Pentecost. It affected her right side and her speech. She was nursed by Katherine [sic] and Vanessa Pearce at Bonnefoi. Bertha was not strong at the time of Edith's death and spent a lot of time in bed. She had hardening of the arteries, and had dizzy spells. Being diabetic didn't help. Her memory was going. But she must have been lost without Edith and became even more dependent on Catherine, which in the end was a burden for Catherine. My mother remembers getting SOS phone calls to come over as Bertha was having a bad spell. My

mother would gallop over on horse back as she could get there faster by riding. She rode a cross-racehorse called Splendid Ken who was a magnificent horse and won many races in PMB. Bertha went back to the Transvaal from 87 Howick Road in about 1959, as I was staying in digs and Bryan was teaching in Zimbabwe. I remember that Edith stayed in PMB for a while as she had dislocated her shoulder and was convalescing in a place at Kloof. Bertie and Caths stayed at Riverlands for a bit. But my mother was worried as Bertie was depressed. They then decided to go back to Bonnefoi in about 1960. Edith joined them there and lived in the rooms off the courtyard. [Rough sketch supplied].

**Q33:** Although it was considered impolite to discuss politics in conversation, Bertha has frequently mentioned her desire to help with the war effort (WW1 especially). However, as far as I have read, Bertha makes no comment about the Anglo Boer war, nor other political events during her life on the farm in SA. On the one day when she could have voted, she was ill, apparently. What do you know of her political stance or even awareness of contemporary historical or political events? Somewhere she mentioned that she would support so-n-so as he was an Englishman and a gentleman, but didn't appear to approve of any politicians. Was Charles interested in politics? Any comments?

A: Smuts stayed at Bonnefoi for one night. She picked him up at Moedig siding. My mother, at age 12, drove Smuts to Bonnefoi.

I don't remember that politics was ever discussed. The war was discussed but I was too young to listen. The same applies to the [Anglo] Boer war. I know that Bertie was worried about something during about 1911 and decided that the children must practice getting away on horse back. Rosamund, while sitting on the horse, pulled her knees up to make herself as small as possible and said, "don't shoot".

**Q34:** Were Bertha's three pregnancies and deliveries "normal"? Did she have protracted labours? Did she breastfeed the children herself or employ a wet-nurse or use bottle feed?

A: Yes the deliveries were normal. But all the children weighed 8 ½ to 9 kg's [sic, probably pounds]. She breastfed them all, as well as a boer baby whose mother was unable to feed the baby.

**Q35:** Please could you supply me with a list of the farms that Charles acquired and their whereabouts? Which children inherited them and what has become of them?

A: Kwaggafontein, Hebron, Mislukt, Bloemfotein, Schoonwater, Boshoeck, Lekkerdraai, Micaridge at Badplaas or [some call it] called Doornport, huge farm at the Bar. R [Ruth] used for shooting trips (in Swaziland). Bertha handed over Bonnefoi Home to Sebastian and Julie after the war. Bertha moved into Thurlston, ½ k from Bonnefoi. It belonged to Horace Everard and after he died it went back to Charles.